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Dr The Arrest on Original









LORD GARLFORD'S FREAK.

BY

JAMES B. BAYNARD,

AUTHOR OF 'THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LORD GARLFORD'S FREAK.

CHAPTER I.

'HE IS NOT MY HUSBAND!'

Aunt Barbara's; the bride and bridegroom had started upon their honeymoon tour; the aristocratic stranger who had signed his name in the marriage registers as Robert Chutney had likewise taken his leave; and the only persons remaining in the house besides Aunt Barbara, were Felicia, the lady mayoress, and Mr. Benjamin Eagles. They were not a lively party after the departure of Virginia and her husband. Perhaps, under similar circumstances, relatives are not usually disposed VOL. III.

to be merry; sometimes a few of them are more inclined for tears than laughter. At any rate, such was the case with the family circle gathered under Aunt Barbara's roof.

For one thing, Uncle Benjamin depressed their spirits by taking a gloomy view of the bride's future. He declared that he feared she had not made a wise choice, and in that respect agreed with his brother Andrew, whom he blamed, however, for not marrying his daughter from his own house, and for not giving her away in his own person at the wedding. Certainly, Mr. Dangerfield was not the kind of man he should have supposed that his niece would fall in love with. Virginia was a staid, gentle-hearted girl, most unworldly in her views, and having a great affection for the services at Thacker's Yard. Her husband, on the other hand, had appeared to him to be a man of the world, somewhat shallow, selfish, vain, opinionated, and devoted to pleasure. His very calling was a temptation and a snare. 'Those painting fellows,' in Uncle Benjamin's judgment, were more given to drinking beer and smoking short pipes, to noisy mirth and low company,

than to such a sober, respectable, and devout life as suited his niece's temperament and convictions. He hoped she would be happy, but had grave doubts upon the subject. It was unfortunate for her, too, that there had been the recent estrangement on the part of the mayor with respect to his son-in-law. Mr. Dangerfield might have given way a little to him. The young man had made no attempt at conciliation, nor had he shown that respect to Virginia's father which was fitting under the circumstances. He (Uncle Benjamin) was sure they all regretted that the dispute as to where the marriage ceremony was to take place, should have had this unhappy result.

Upon this, Felicia and Mrs. Eagles thanked Aunt Barbara, for the twentieth time, for her kind offer to provide the wedding breakfast, and thus extricate the lovers from their embarrassing situation. Aunt Barbara replied that she had not provided the breakfast. The expense had been borne by her brother Andrew and the mayoress, who had not permitted her to carry out her intention. Then they expatiated upon the

good qualities possessed by the absent bride, —her gentle yielding disposition, her thoughtfulness for others, her beauty and gracefulness.

Felicia spoke of the time when, the honey-moon over, the wedded pair would settle down in their pretty house at Richmond. She herself had been invited, as a matter of course, to go and make a long stay with her sister when that time arrived. What a happy re-union it would be, and how heartily she wished the honeymoon was already over! Had she known that, before the week was ended,—nay! before three days were past, she would see Virginia again,—how she would have hated herself for breathing such a wish!

By way of dissipating the gloom that was beginning to settle upon all their spirits, Uncle Benjamin proposed that they should all go and finish the day at the Crystal Palace, remarking, that since they were so soon to separate (Felicia and the mayoress were to return to Davenstone the next day, and Uncle Benjamin himself was going home at the same time), they ought to have as much pleasure

as possible while they were together. This suggestion was approved of, and they went to the Crystal Palace accordingly; but nothing availed to drive away the melancholy that had so strangely seized upon Felicia. None of the party, indeed, had any real enjoyment. They soon came back again; and long before their usual hour for retiring, they went jaded and dispirited to bed.

Even when they met at the breakfast table the next morning, none of them displayed their usual cheerfulness. The meal was eaten almost in silence, and it had not been long ended, when Uncle Benjamin took leave of them, and went away to his business in the city. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Eagles and Felicia said good-bye to Aunt Barbara and returned to Davenstone. Thus the wedding festivities had come to a somewhat abrupt and not altogether satisfactory termination.

Mr. Eagles, when his wife and daughter reached home, and related to him the incidents of the past few days, again protested his belief that Virginia would live to repent her choice.

'I fear she has cast herself away,' said he.
'Those artists are hare-brained, wild, random

fellows, and Dangerfield is like the rest of them.'

One evening in that week, Felicia was left alone in the little back drawing-room, Mrs. Eagles having retired to her chamber at an unusually early hour on account of a sick headache, and the mayor being at a public meeting in St. John's Hall. At nine o'clock she dismissed the servants to bed, and sat down to occupy herself with a book until her father's return.

It was a dark, gusty night. The rain was falling fast out of doors, but the blinds were drawn down, and the lights burning cheerfully in the little room. Felicia endeavoured to keep her attention fixed upon the book; but the strange stillness brooding over the house, the howling of the wind and the melancholy dripping of the shower,—combined with the recollection of her father's words respecting Virginia,—rendered her extremely uneasy and nervous. She tried to banish her fears in relation to her sister, whom she supposed to be at that moment hundreds of miles away; but vague forebodings of evil distracted her mind, causing her to cast the book aside and

pace the room in uncontrollable excitement and agitation.

What mysterious power was it which drew her thoughts back to that time of affliction in the days of their childhood, when death entered the old home at Slagthorpe? She beheld her mother lying stiff and cold upon the bed, and her agonised father kneeling by the body, while Virginia and herself were weeping—oh! how bitterly! Then she thought of their old nurse-Nurse Tenby-who had soothed and comforted the little ones in their bereavement, promising that she herself would be like a mother to them, if they would let her. Nobly had their humble friend kept her word. Nurse Tenby's mild, gentle ways, and thoughtful care, had taken some of the sting from their desolation.

Felicia remembered how fond she and her sister became of 'Granny,' as they called her; and how, when her father removed to Davenstone, soon after his marriage to the present Mrs. Eagles, they had begged that Nurse Tenby might still live with them. The dear old soul, though she could not be induced to leave her native county, yet paid them

a visit now and then at this grand house by the churchyard. The girls had grown into womanhood, but they still had a great affection for 'Granny,' and corresponded with her to this very day.

All these old memories crowded upon Felicia as she paced the room, wondering at her own restlessness.

Going to the window, she drew the curtain aside, and peered forth into the darkness. The gloomy outline of objects—the wide lawn, with an old grotto at the farther end, garnished with grotesque fragments taken from the ruins of the ancient priory; the black top of a spreading cedar tree, with the lowering sky beyond:—these and other features of the scene were barely distinguishable. How fast the rain came down! It was a wretched night for wanderers, or travellers of any description. The gloom was almost impenetrable, and the wind—how blusterous and keen it was! Felicia shivered as she turned away.

Her thoughts had again reverted to her sister, and she was inwardly praying with much fervour that her married life might prove a happy one, when a low tap came to the kitchen door, which was at the end of a long passage, and was locked and bolted. With a start of surprise and terror, Felicia went to the window and looked forth again. Nothing to be seen? No!—Yes! Straining her eyes to the utmost as she put her face close to the pane, she strove to pierce the dismal obscurity. She descried a female figure, but it was thickly draped, and the upper portion was hidden by an open umbrella. Whoever it might be, the figure was endeavouring to enter the house, for the latch was lifted, and the door pushed at, in vain.

Disquieted above measure, as she saw and heard this,—her heart fainting within her,—Felicia nevertheless lost not a moment. The servants were all in bed. She would go herself and ascertain who this strange importunate visitor could be. She trembled violently as she glided along the passage and entered the kitchen. 'Who is there? speak quickly!' she whispered.

'It is I'—answered a voice, at the sound of which Felicia opened the door with frantic haste. Then, as it was flung wide open,—drenched with rain, and cowering, not with cold, but with distress and anguish, the form of Virginia stood revealed!

The sisters clung together in a long embrace. 'Oh! my poor, poor darling!' cried Felicia, while her brain seemed all on fire, 'what is the meaning of this?'

Virginia staggered into the house, pale as a ghost, her eyes sunken, and her superb countenance full of unspeakable woe. Her sister tore off her soaked upper garments, and seated her before a blazing fire. She kissed her and embraced her again and again; and after a while said caressingly, 'Why have you returned, darling? Where is your husband?'

A vast number of wild conjectures passed through her mind as she asked this question. She scarcely dared to breathe the words; and yet they escaped from her involuntarily. To see that beautiful face so woe-begone pierced her heart, while burning thoughts of indignation against the man who had forced her sister into this extremity almost choked her utterance. Virginia, at first, had sat

speechless and rigid as a statue, but she was now melted into tears.

'Be comforted, dear,' whispered Felicia, 'and tell me why you have left him? Mamma and the servants are in bed, and papa has not yet returned from a public meeting. It will ease your mind, darling, to unburden your trouble to me, now we are by ourselves. Where is Charles?'

At the mention of his name Virginia buried her face in her hands, and sobbed violently.

Her sister waited until the passion of grief should have spent itself, and she should become calm. 'It is not that they have quarrelled,' thought Felicia; 'it is something worse. She would not have left him merely because high words had passed between them, or even because he had been cruel to her. She has parted from him, I believe, for some mysterious reason connected with the marriage ceremony.'

'Darling, why have you left him?' she again whispered, affectionately clinging round her sister's neck.

Virginia dried her lovely eyes, and endeavouring to speak with composure, although the quivering lip still betrayed the depth of her emotion, replied,—'On the third morning after our marriage, Charles made a confession to me which proved beyond a doubt that I was not his lawful wife, and that if I continued to live with him, it must be as his mistress. I loved him even then with my whole heart, and I love him now: but I could not remain with him a moment under these altered cir-I immediately left him, and I cumstances. will never return to him again. You must not ask me, darling, to explain to you what that confession was. It is a secret which I cannot divulge. So long as it remains in my keeping, Charles is safe; but papa would kill him in his anger were he to be put in possession of it.'

'Charles Dangerfield not your lawful husband!' cried Felicia, incapable, in her extreme amazement, of any further remark.

'He is not my lawful husband,' responded Virginia, motioning with her fair hand as though deprecating contradiction.

'Virginia !--'

'It is as I tell you, darling. I am not his lawful wife. Have I not done right to leave him?'

'Quite right; you have acted exactly as I should have done myself,' replied her sister, kissing her fondly. In the mind of Felicia there were at that moment very hard thoughts respecting the absent artist. 'He has betrayed her,' she said to herself. 'Papa's warning has been fulfilled. Papa always said the man was perfidious, that Virginia would be ensnared,—and his words have proved to be true!'

'Then Charles Dangerfield was false-hearted after all,' she said, in a low tone. 'When he came paying his addresses to you in this house, he was married already, I suppose.'

'He is not false-hearted, dear. Do not say that of him. I love him still, and I am sure that he loves me too. But I cannot explain. The only way in which I can shield him from injury, is by faithfully keeping his secret.'

'But, darling, you were legally married to him, unless he had a wife already. Was that the case?'

'Do not question me, sweet. I dare not reveal more than I have already done. But

if you knew all, you would be fully convinced it was not a true marriage.'

'You have done quite right, darling, to come home,' said Felicia, with another caress. 'And you will tell papa everything, will you not? What will he say? He will be very angry with Charles.'

'Yes, but Charles is now far away, and he will never find him if I keep my secret. Therefore, I dare not tell papa more than I have told you.'

'How late he is to-night!' said Felicia. 'But listen!' she continued, holding up her finger,—'I hear his footstep on the causeway outside. He is now letting himself in at the front door. I will go and meet him, dearest, and prepare him for seeing you.'

So saying, Felicia gave her sister one more kiss, and left the room.





CHAPTER II.

FLIGHT.

APA, come in here a moment.'

Felicia opened the door of the front drawing-room, where they could converse together privately. The mayor followed her in, greatly perplexed as he beheld her troubled countenance, and the air of mystery with which she had greeted him when he entered the house.

'What is it, child? Why do you bring me into this cold, cheerless room?' he asked, with some show of irritation. His face looked worn and weary; his clothes were dripping with wet.

'Hush, papa; do not speak so loud,' she said with a gesture of entreaty. 'Do not be angry. Be prepared, dear papa, for ill news. Virginia has returned home.'

It flashed upon him in an instant that Dangerfield had been practising some deception upon them all, and that the bride, on discovering the trick, had immediately left him.

'She has been duped,—my daughter is undone!' he groaned. It was a heavy blow for the proud Yorkshireman. He grasped a chair tightly to keep himself from falling to the floor.

- 'Do you mean—are you telling me—that she—has run away from—him?'
 - 'Yes, papa.'
- 'Not a sudden quarrel—or anything of that kind?'
 - 'No, papa; she has found out something.'
 - 'Tush! tush! it was a true marriage?'
 - 'She says not, papa.'
- 'Where is she?' asked the mayor, his face blanched, his lips trembling.
 - 'In the sitting-room, papa.'
- 'What is it she has found out to make her think it was not a legal marriage? The scoundrel had a wife already, I suppose?'
- 'I can hardly explain, papa. She has not told me all. She seems confused, dazed, stupefied, as it were; but she protests she is

not truly his wife, and he is not her husband. She fled from under his roof when she discovered the fraud.'

- 'But I want to know the nature of the fraud,' said her father impatiently.
 - 'She will not say, papa.'
- 'But she *must* say, in order that we may judge for ourselves. Let us go to her.'
- 'Speak gently to her, dear papa,' she whispered, as she followed him along the hall.

When the mayor entered the sitting-room, Virginia fell at his feet in an agony of distress. Her father raised her tenderly, kissed her, and placed her in a chair.

- 'Do not give way, my child,' said he; 'all may yet be well. Give me a full explanation of this matter. Relate the circumstances fully.'
- 'Charles made a confession to me this morning, papa.'
 - 'What caused him to do so?'
- 'I asked him a question. I had suspected for two days that there had been some deception, and I spoke to him about it.'
 - 'Yes. Go on.'
- 'Charles then made a startling revelation to me. Up to that moment I had believed that vol. III.

I was his lawful wife; but what he confessed proved beyond a doubt I was only his mistress. Could I remain under his roof another moment?'

'Certainly not,' replied her father. 'What was the substance of this confession you speak of? Give me, if you can, the exact words he used.'

'It is impossible, papa.'

'Was he married already?' asked the mayor, with a keen glance at his elder daughter.

'Papa,' said Felicia, laying her hand gently upon his arm, 'I think she would tell you everything, if you would give your solemn promise never to take proceedings of any kind against Charles Dangerfield. Say that you will never seek to visit any punishment upon him for what he has done.'

'I will give no such promise,' replied the Yorkshireman sternly. 'Tell me,' he added turning to Virginia,—'was the man married already?'

'I must not answer.'

The words dropped like lumps of ice from frozen lips. Her father was manifestly displeased, and even Felicia urgently entreated her to reveal the purport of Charles Dangerfield's confession. But nothing could shake Virginia's determination to shield the man she loved by preserving his secret inviolate. At length, finding that she was not to be moved by anything he could say to her, the mayor remarked that she would 'probably be wiser in the morning,' and advised his daughters to go to bed, for it was past midnight.

They kissed him on the cheek, and he bade them 'Good night,' his manner to Virginia being cold and restrained. When she had reached the door, she stole back to him, and putting her arms round his neck, whispered, 'Try to forgive me, dearest papa.' She then hastily left the room with her sister.

Having seen all secure, the Yorkshireman also soon retired upstairs, and very shortly afterwards the house was wrapped in darkness and silence.

The girls slept in separate bedrooms. Virginia's chamber was immediately over the little sitting-room where the scene we have described took place. When Felicia had left her alone (for they had passed some time together in the bedroom, talking over this great trouble), Virginia sat down wearily, to

think over the situation. Her father meant to question her again in the morning. Would it not be better to fly somewhere where she could not be cross-examined? She distrusted her power to keep the secret on which Charles' safety depended if she remained at home. Already her father was estranged from her, and even her sister wished to wrest her secret from her keeping. Would it not be far better to escape from their reproachful glances and importunate entreaties, by leaving the house altogether? If she stayed, she would only render them all as miserable as she was herself. It could never again be the same dear, happy home. Her presence would become hateful to them because of the mystery she could not divulge, and they would upbraid her continually. They would be less wretched if she were away from them. But whither should she fly? There was Uncle Benjamin; there was Aunt Barbara; and there was Nurse Tenby. She thought long and earnestly upon this point, but still she remained in doubt. down by the bed, she poured out her heart in prayer, in the language of one of the Psalms:-'In thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; let me

never be put to confusion; deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; make haste to deliver me. Have mercy upon me, O God, for I am in trouble, and mine eye is consumed for very heaviness.'

Rising with a fixed resolution and restored calmness, she wrote the following letter to her father :-- 'I would have told you everything, dear papa, if my confidences could only end with ourselves: but I am sure I had better avoid them for his sake, and for your sake, and for mine. When you read these lines, I shall be far away. not be distressed for me. I am going to earn my own living in a new home. At present I dare not tell you where that home will be. It is better I should be away from you, now there is a forbidden subject between us; for how could you show the same warmth of feeling, the same close sympathy, so long as there is something I refused to disclose? The one fact which I must keep concealed would always be a barrier between us. Good-bye, dearest papa.

She then with many tears wrote a warm, loving farewell to her sister; and having folded and directed the two letters, she placed them upon the dressing-table, where they could

readily be seen in the morning. Then she packed a few necessary articles of clothing, and having thus completed her preparations for flight, she sat down and waited for the dawn.

How keenly she felt the parting from Felicia, it is impossible to describe. The two sisters had been all in all to each other; and to leave her thus—to sever, as it were, by this act, the bond that had connected them together so closely, was the greatest trial of her life. But the separation must take place for *Charles'* sake. His well-being depended upon the preservation of the secret. She therefore did not hesitate to make the sacrifice, which, in her view, the circumstances demanded.

At the first appearance of day—some time before the hour at which the servants awoke or the stillness was disturbed, Virginia, having attired herself in plain homely garments, and drawn a thick veil over her features, silently descended the stairs, and let herself out by the kitchen door. Walking round to the front of the house, she waited upon the pebbled causeway. Soon a respectable old man, a meekeyed weaver, came shambling by. To this stranger she offered half-a-crown to carry her

luggage to the railway station. Shouldering her portmanteau and carrying her bag in the other hand, the man at once set off, Virginia walking behind him. The railway station was soon reached; a train bound for London shortly afterwards glided in; her ticket was taken, and in another five minutes she was seated in a first-class carriage, and on her way to the capital.

She had decided to take refuge with Aunt Barbara for a few days, and to seek her advice as to her future course of action. But before the train reached London, grave doubts respecting the wisdom of this step entered her mind, and she was distressed with incertitude. She continued her journey, however, anxiously debating the subject in her own mind; and having come to no resolution when she had arrived at Bayswater, she hailed a cab, and directed the driver to take her to her aunt's house. But before many streets had been traversed, her plans were laid. She would not go to Aunt Barbara's, where she could easily be found, not only by her father and sister, but also by Charles, whom she wished to avoid of all

people. She would hide herself with dear old Nurse Tenby in that far-off home at Slagthorpe, in the county of Durham. She stopped the cab at once, and ordered the driver to take her back to the railway station.

When she started for the north it was nearly noon, and she had a ride of three hundred miles before her.

The train reached Slagthorpe as night was closing in. Faint, weary, sick at heart, alone among strangers, Virginia shuddered as she heard in the darkness the booming of the ocean (the town was on the northeast coast), and saw a distant lighthouse, whose beams were trembling over the dismal waters. Virginia had always felt a dread of the crawling, treacherous sea; her aversion was intensely deepened now. She stepped on to the platform shivering with the cold (for a pitiless east wind was blowing), and timidly spoke to a porter, who shouldered her box and led her to a cabstand in the street. When she told the man she wished to be taken to Mrs. Tenby's, he replied, in a strong north-country accent, that the old lady had removed from her former abode, and now lived at a lone farmhouse about two miles distant, and situated on the sea shore.

'It's a long stretch, honey, an' a bad road, but I'll tak' ye for half-a-croon,' said the driver, and she crept wearily into the cab. There was an inky sky overhead, and every object around her was indistinct, gloomy, and forbidding. Very soon she was aware, from the sullen echo of the wheels and the screaming of locomotive engines underneath, that she was passing over a railway bridge. In another minute the cab was ploughing through sand a yard deep, and she knew her journey along the coast had begun. A miserable feeling of helplessness came over her, imprisoned as she was in the vehicle, being dragged and jolted along over the low sandhills,—in the very jaws (as it seemed) of the hungry sea, whose waves moaned and roared in her ears as the tide came in almost to the wheels. The hoarse thunder of the billows and the roughness of the way, combined with the obscurity of the night to render the horse restive and

unwilling to proceed. Upon this the cabman became furious, and began to beat the animal unmercifully, until he reared and swerved aside from the track. It was too dark for her to see anything as she peered out of the windows, in a state of extreme alarm, for she feared that the horse might rush madly into the ocean. She felt stifled and longed for liberty.

'Stop!' she cried frantically, 'the poor beast is frightened! Don't go any farther. I will walk the rest of the way.'

'Nay, nay, get in, honey; I'll drive ye all right.' For by this Virginia was standing knee deep in the soft sand, her hair dishevelled, and her clothing whirled about by the wind.

'It's but a step or twa noo, honey,' said the driver reassuringly. So she ventured in again, and the cab, making deep ruts and progressing slowly and toilsomely, bore her onward once more, through this strange unknown region, where the people were rough and hard in their manners, and where danger frowned upon her at every step. It was a lonely, forsaken place, weird and ghostly. How chill was the blast; how insatiable and merciless was the hunger of the sea! 'Had I known,' thought Virginia, 'I would have stayed at the hotel, and gone on in the morning.' It was so dark that the driver could not see the track, and it seemed to the poor girl, as the roar of the tide grew louder, that they would be engulfed in the wayes.

- 'Do let me get out!' she said appealingly.
- 'Another twenty yards, honey, and we'll be there,' he replied.

After a little more jolting over the sandhills, the cab stopped at a black, frowning building; a light appeared at the door, and the mild face of an old lady peered forth.

'O granny! my darling granny!' She threw herself in Nurse Tenby's arms, and was led into the kitchen, and seated before a blazing sea-coal fire.





CHAPTER III.

THE COACH'S LAST JOURNEY.

E have already stated, in a former chapter of this history, that Councillor Laxey followed the calling of a builder and contractor. The reader has also been informed that his business was a most flourishing one. Now at this time he was engaged upon several public works of an important character, some of which were at a standstill for want of timber, a large supply of which was expected from Winterham, a seaport town on the north-east coast, in the county of Durham. The delay in the arrival of the timber was a serious inconvenience to Laxey, who judged it expedient to make a journey to Winterham, where this building material was imported to a considerable extent from the Baltic Sea.

One Saturday afternoon, two days before he was to start for the north, the Councillor walked into the Lady Enid Hotel. He was going, in company with the innkeeper's daughter, to take a final jaunt to Bayborough upon Lord Garlford's coach, running that day for the last time. When Laxey entered the bar, it was not more than ten minutes past three o'clock. He meant to have a chat with Rose previously to their mounting the drag. Fortunately he found her alone, attired for the excursion, making some entries in a ledger. He gave her a kiss, and said gaily,—

- 'So you are not locked up to-day out of Lord Garlford's sight?'
- 'No, sir, I am not,' she replied, with a laugh and a rosy blush.
- 'Then I am sure that distractingly bewitching face of yours will make his hand unsteady; and I should not like an accident to happen to finish the season with. I am glad to-day's is the last excursion he will make. Yes, I am.'
 - 'Why are you glad?'
- 'Because you will not be able to run up to the drag any more before it starts, and ask him to kiss you.'

- 'Don't be absurd, Val; now, go away, sir. What do you want?'
- 'I want to hang these in your ears,' said the gamesome Councillor, producing a pair of brilliants.
- 'Oh, Val, how lovely!' she exclaimed as she examined them. 'These are not for me? They are too expensive.'
- 'They are only paste,' he replied, with another of his comical looks, as he fixed them in her pearly ears. 'I couldn't afford the real article.'
- 'Go along with you! It's the most beautiful jewellery I ever saw.'
- 'You won't marry Lord Garlford now, will you?'
- 'No, indeed; besides, he is not likely to ask me,' laughed Rose naively. 'Oh, Val, how good you are!'
 - 'It's only paste, I assure you.'
 - 'Don't tell me, sir!'
 - 'Rose?'
 - 'Well, what now?'
- 'Lord Garlford and I were fighting in the stables yesterday, about you! We were!'
 - 'Good gracious! What for, Val?'

- 'Because he said you wore a glass eye and a wooden leg. We fought twenty rounds in the stables.'
 - 'No!'
- 'We did. Fact! and I punished him so severely that he couldn't drive the coach that afternoon—don't you remember?'
- 'I know he came in from Bayborough as usual, and then drove home to Garlford Castle, leaving Bob Skittler to tool the drag in his place,' replied Rose.
- 'Well,' said the jocose Councillor, 'the real reason was that he had two black eyes, an arm disabled, and three of his ribs broken.'
- Mr. Melody and his pretty wife came into the bar at this juncture, and the landlord proceeded to tell his future son-in-law how he had made arrangements for having Pepper's house pulled down and the inn-yard widened. Mrs. Melody asked the Councillor when he was going to Winterham, for he had told her a day or two previously that he had made up his mind for the journey.
 - 'On Monday, I believe,' said Laxey.
 - 'Then you will come and take tea with us

to-morrow, won't you, Val? said pretty Mrs. Melody.

The Councillor thanked her, and of course accepted the invitation. He then questioned the black-bearded innkeeper as to the pecuniary results of Lord Garlford's undertaking.

- 'I believe his lordship is satisfied on the whole,' said Melody, cautiously.
 - 'Will he be a loser?' asked Laxey.
- 'No; it has paid expenses, and left his lordship a little profit besides.'
- 'Hasn't he given it up somewhat sooner than you expected?'
- 'Well, yes; I thought he would have continued the excursions a week or two longer, perhaps. But, you see, the days are getting shorter; the weather, too, has not been favourable lately; and there has been a considerable falling off in the number of passengers.'

The innkeeper then went out to superintend the preparations for Lord Garlford's arrival. The earl had not come in from Bayborough by the drag that day, but he had sent a telegram saying that he should be at the hotel in time to drive the coach upon its last journey. A few minutes afterwards he appeared at the bar to

despatch his sherry and biscuit before the start, while the team of chestnuts was being brought out and harnessed with the usual ceremony.

The lord's demeanour to-day, when he spoke to Mrs. Melody or the innkeeper (Laxey and Rose had already mounted the drag in the street), was as gracious and kind as ever, but he was less talkative. He ate his biscuit and drank his sherry with an air of abstraction. He looked pale and careworn. Before he went out, while pulling on his driving gloves, he said to the landlord, slowly and thoughtfully,

'I wish to remark, Melody, that I am exceedingly gratified by the manner in which you have carried out my instructions from the first day on which the drag started until now. I also thank you for the many attentions you have paid me, and the time you have bestowed since I commenced this undertaking. May I also express my high appreciation of your excellent wife's management of this establishment! Mrs. Melody, I wish you good-day.'

The earl bowed as he made this little speech in his most affable manner, and then he walked moodily up the yard. The spectators, gathered in the street to see the four-in-hand make its last journey, raised a lusty cheer as he ascended to the bench, and coolly took the ribbons in his hand. In another moment the ostlers started back, the thoroughbreds went off at a trot, and Melody and his wife, having stood waving their hands to Rose and the Councillor, brushed a tear away when the drag swept round the corner and was out of sight.

The landlord had scarcely entered the hotel, when a messenger handed him a small parcel. It was found, on being opened, to contain a jewelled ring for the innkeeper, and a pair of gold earrings for pretty Mrs. Melody, and was accompanied by the following note:—
'Lord Garlford presents his compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Melody, and hopes they will allow him to make them this trifling present as a memento of the enterprise just brought to a successful termination, and also as a slight acknowledgment of their very valuable services.'

The reader may as well be informed in this place that the hotel-keeper's bill, when in due course presented to the earl, was promptly and honourably discharged.

The next day was that on which Valentine Laxey had been invited to take tea at the inn. It was Sunday-a day which the Italianlooking landlord and his graceful wife always spent well and happily. For one thing, they never missed the morning service at St. Peter's. The vicar of that grand old church was known far and wide as a man of a nimble wit and genial hearty manners; also as an eloquent preacher, whose strident tones penetrated every corner of even that vast edifice. To him Melody listened with rapt attention. The innkeeper's soul was moved also by the sublime liturgy and the sweet music, the effect of which was heightened as he looked upon those colossal windows of exquisitely stained glass, and that arcaded forest of arches, which proclaimed his parish church to be the finest in England.

With a good conscience the landlord could then eat his dinner at home and enjoy his dessert with his pretty wife, his rosy daughter, and saucy Jack. Then silence fell over the house while the proprietor, having spread a silk handkerchief over his sallow features, slept the sleep of the just. He was awakened at five o'clock by the musical tinkle of silver spoons upon china cups and saucers, and his drowsy senses were invigorated by buttered toast and tea. Then this conscientious churchman was ready for the evening service, which he attended with almost as much regularity as the morning one. On this particular Sunday our friend the Councillor shared their buttered toast and tea, and afterwards went with them to church. The Vicar's sermon being ended on that hot autumn evening, they came out of the close stifling atmosphere (for the edifice had been as usual crowded to suffocation) into the free balmy air; and as they sauntered down Hertford Street, Mrs. Melody suggested that they should walk into the Park. 'Agreed,' said they all joyously. It was a still, lovely evening, and they chatted gaily as they lounged through the vast throng of Davenstonians. People were pouring out of all the chapels and churches—the different streams meeting and melting into each other without noise or confusion. The town was eminently devoted to religious exercises.

'About eighty per cent. of our population attend somewhere or other,' remarked the

innkeeper proudly. 'We are not so godless as they are in some places.'

- 'How hushed and quiet they all are!' said Rose.
- 'Now,' said Mrs. Melody, 'I feel the things of heaven to be a solemn reality. My spirit is chastened. I experience an overflowing tenderness and charity for all persons.'
- 'Yes, my love,' said he, 'the same thoughts were in my own mind too. Valentine,' he continued, turning to the Councillor, who was walking with Rose, 'how long are you likely to stay at Winterham?'
- 'A week or more,' he replied. 'It will depend on the time when the timber will arrive from the Baltic Sea.'

They had now got clear of the vast concourse of people that blocked the street, and had entered the precincts of the park. It still retained its ancient name, though it was now simply a collection of private gardens, rented by the superior tradesmen and shop-keepers of the town, who maintained a friendly rivalry on the subject of asparagus, early peas, big gooseberries, and mealy potatoes. Broad alleys traversed the park, while the gardens

themselves were separated from each other by lofty impervious privet hedges, so as to give them a private and respectable appearance. They were much more aristocratic therefore than those in the watchmaker's quarter of the city, which were merely bordered by old palings, and had their tiny wooden tool-houses exposed and prominent to the eye. Too many of the craftsmen there wielded the spade and hoe during uncanonical hours, that is to say, at times when they should have been at church; but the owners of the park gardens did their husbandry by proxy, and sauntered thither on Sunday evenings, after service was over, in shining top hats and kid gloves, leading their wives in satin bonnets and dazzling dresses; and they contemplated their cabbages while the echo of the organ and the stirring tones of the preacher still rang in their ears. Melody entered his own garden on this balmy autumn evening, and seated himself in the summer house with his wife, his daughter, and her lover. Here they listened to the nightingale, while the sweet scent of flowers was wafted to them by the calm air. How happy e innkeeper felt! He had reason to be

He was in comfortable, easy cirhappy. cumstances: his wife was the best manager and one of the prettiest women in Davenstone. He felt no envy of his neighbours, was harassed by no strivings after the unattainable. He thought of his early roving life-of the dram store in Minnesota, the hogslaughtering at Chicago, the fighting he had seen in Africa: and now, he was at peace with all the world; he possessed true heart's ease,—he was content. As his wife listened to his high-pitched voice (it was not strong: there was a touch of weakness in it, the lungs had a flaw somewhere), its merry intonation, and the bright glance of his eye when he made a playful remark, told her quite plainly that this lively utterance of common things was the expression of a deep inward repose and joy.

Under the floor of the summer-house there was a store of wine, kept for occasions like the present. The trap-door was lifted,—a choice bottle or two produced, together with a bundle of cigars for the two men; and just as they were at the height of their felicity, Alderman Jeffard walked jauntily up the garden to share it with them.

'By George! I've come just in time,' said he.

They sat in the gloaming then, and Councillor Laxey, thinking of his speedy departure for Winterham, began in a half jocular, half pathetic tone, to recite Eve's Lamentation:—

'O, unexpected stroke and worse than death! Must I thus leave thee, Paradise? thus leave Thee, native soil! these happy walks and shades, Fit haunt of gods?'—

Then Alderman Jeffard, to divert his friend's mind from this sentimental view, spoke of a favourite scheme of his in relation to the Freemen's Trust (for most of the public gardens of the city belonged to the freemen).

- 'If I had my way, I would remodel the entire system of these charities,—be hanged if I wouldn't. The trustees should none of them be men of Davenstone—'
 - 'Hear, hear!' said Laxey.
- 'They should be chosen from neighbouring towns, so that they could administer the trust without having favouritism. Why, I could mention trustees who procure loans for their own workpeople, who are in receipt of good wages, to the injury and loss of needy persons, the

employers getting labour cheaper by that means. I say, choose strangers, and pay them well for coming over here—say four times a year; and let them elect an inspector to investigate all cases and report accordingly.'

'I think your plan would answer very well,' said Melody, as he puffed away at his cigar. His wife, thinking this topic too secular for Sunday evening, forthwith gave the men a little lecture, and brought the conversation round to the services at St. Peter's, and the unbecoming finery too often seen there upon the backs and heads of the ladies in the congregation. At length they all rose, the parting toast being proposed by the innkeeper and drunk with enthusiasm.

'Here's success to Valentine's journey to the north, and a speedy return home again!'





CHAPTER IV.

ON THE SANDHILLS.

Virginia had taken refuge, was a very large, substantial stone building, with walls of enormous thickness, and was said to have been built by a nobleman many years ago as a retreat for his family during the bathing season. It passed to other hands after a time, and soon fell into a state of neglect and decay. Eventually it was divided into two dwellings, the end nearest the beach being converted into a farm house, and the other portion being let out in lodgings for summer visitors. This was now rented by Nurse Tenby.

The house was a solitary one. No other habitation of any kind was to be seen within a quarter of a mile. It stood quite close to

the sea, and notwithstanding the great strength of the walls, the easterly gales frequently seemed to rock it to its foundations.

Virginia passed a troubled night under Nurse Tenby's roof. A hurricane raged round the house from the time she entered it (in the manner described in a previous chapter) till dawn the next day, and she really lay in her bed in a state of extreme terror. When she rose the next morning, there was a lowering sky overhead, the wind still howled savagely, her blood was chilled and her skin shrivelled: and as she looked out of her bed-room window, her teeth chattered with the cold. The prospect was certainly not a cheering one. On the one side was the ocean—the pitiless, insatiable ocean, which she dreaded so muchlooking dull and grey, and rolling up to the walls almost, with a hoarse thunder. Right before her stretched the sandy shore—a succession of hillocks which were mostly bare, though some of them were covered with scanty patches of long grass, shivering in the blasts that swept from the open sea. All along the wet beach were streaks of black powder, cast up by the waves. It was sea coal. A host of ragged, bare-legged women and children, were raking it together in heaps, and carting it away to their cottages for fuel. Over the low sea wall the sand had been whirled in thick clouds, settling on the poor farmer's fields, to the serious detriment of his crops. Altogether it was a weird, bleak, forsaken-looking region.

Virginia plucked up her spirits, however, and went downstairs to help Nurse Tenby with the breakfast. 'Granny' was a small, active woman of some seventy years, with a mild blue eye, and a wholesome, albeit wrinkled face. She was neatly attired in white cap, a brown dress, and a clean apron. Having greeted the old soul, kissed her on the cheek, and cheerfully answered all her enquiries touching her night's rest, Virginia at once lent her hand to the preparations going on in the kitchen. It will of course be understood by the reader that the simple-minded nurse had on the previous night been put in possession of such facts relating to Mr. Dangerfield, the wedding at Aunt Barbara's church, and the subsequent revelation made by Charles to Virginia, as the latter deemed it expedient

to divulge. Granny quite understood why she had fled from her father's house, and why she wished to remain concealed for the present. The gentle old lady fully entered into her views, and entirely approved the step she had taken, meaning to further her intentions to the best of her power.

'Granny dear,' said Virginia with a smile, as they were seated at their frugal breakfast, 'I mean to take a situation, you know. I must, of course, earn my own living like other people. I shall become a governess.'

The old lady replied that she would sooner work her fingers to the bone than she should do such a thing. Her pet should not leave her. She did not know of any family in the neighbourhood that needed a governess, she said, and much more to the same effect. But our heroine kissed her, and said it would make her unhappy to remain a burden to her, and she ought to turn her little stock of knowledge and her so-called accomplishments to some account. So it was arranged that a situation should be sought.

The bright sunny weather had come to an end somewhat abruptly, and most of Nurse

Tenby's lodgers had left her. There now remained, besides 'Granny' and Virginia, only three inmates, namely, Sam Tenby, the old lady's son, a single man of forty or thereabouts, who worked at a blast furnace in Slagthorpe; secondly, a young architect, whose office was at Winterham, two miles distant; and lastly, a surgeon named Rollick. These had all breakfasted very early that morning, and had gone their several ways before our heroine had come downstairs. It was quite possible that either the surgeon or the architect might know of some family in Winterham or the neighbourhood who were in need of a governess. When they came home, 'nurse' meant to speak to them upon the subject.

In the course of the day, Virginia and her humble friend took a walk together to a small cemetery just outside Winterham. Here reposed the remains of the first Mrs. Eagles. Since his second marriage, and removal from the north, the Yorkshireman had brought his two daughters hither at intervals to visit their mother's grave, and it had been faithfully tended by the old nurse, who had visited it, planted flowers and shrubs upon it, and

generally kept it in order during sixteen years. 'To do so has been a labour of love, honey,' she whispered. 'She was my best friend. Your father left it to my care, and he has made me presents.'

They lingered here some time, and then returned homewards through Winterham. This was a modern market town and seaport, as already stated. It had sprung into existence within the last five-and-twenty years. In consequence of its recent origin, all the buildings were of course new, and most of them were serviceable rather than ornamental. was a large and handsome Gothic church, several dissenting chapels, large hotels, an athenæum, two mechanic's institutes, a spacious covered market, a custom-house, two halls, a theatre, and other public buildings. Iron ship-building was carried on to a great extent, and there were extensive iron foundries, blastingfurnaces, rolling-mills, and cement works. harbour was large and commodious. port had been intended chiefly for colliers, but a large foreign trade had sprung up, and the imports now included flax, hemp, grain, timber, etc.

While Virginia was walking through the streets of the town, Valentine Laxey was travelling towards it from Davenstone, quite unconscious of her presence therein. news of her unexpected return home and sudden flight had not spread beyond the walls of the mayor's mansion. The lady mayoress knew, of course, for she had been informed of the night's transactions on the next morning; but the secret had been successfully kept from the servants. on the evening of her return to Davenstone, had left all her luggage at the railway station to be forwarded. When it was subsequently delivered at 'the house by the churchyard,' it had been skilfully kept from the prying eyes of the maids, and their suspicions removed or quieted by a few words from Felicia. We shall soon learn in what manner the secret at last became public property.

To return to Virginia. She walked with a pensive air but queenly step past groups of sailors, pilots, and skippers; past ship-builders' yards and busy quays, past ship-chandlers' and and nautical instrument makers' shops, and marine stores, and public and private houses

On the Sandhills.

of various descriptions, until she came to the iron bridge she had crossed the previous night in the cab. Then she and Granny crossed it, on foot, of course, this time,—and they were now on the sandhills by the sea-shore. Their progress here was slow and toilsome, since they were ankle-deep in the soft sand. The young beauty and her gentle-hearted guide ploughed their way onward, however, talking of the old home, of Felicia, and of the stout Yorkshireman.

'Granny, darling,' said Virginia, 'I do so long to tell them that I have reached my destination safely, and that I love them dearly, though I have fled from them like a guilty thing, and cannot tell them where I am staying. Would it be possible to send a letter without giving them a clue to my whereabouts? If only it could be secretly dropped in the letterbox at home with no post-mark on it at all!—but that is out of the question. Ah me! They would grieve less if they could learn that I was in good hands!'

'Well, honey,' returned her friend, 'Mr. Rollick has a mother living at Learnington, and I heard him say he was going to pay her

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a visit some day next week. You might safely trust him to post a letter for you in the letterbox at Davenstone railway station on his way through.'

'Mr. Rollick is the surgeon who has apartments in your house, Granny, is he not? Oh! how thankful I should be if he would do me this great service.'

'He would be only too pleased, honey,' said Nurse Tenby.

The next moment the old lady uttered a piercing scream as she suddenly looked behind her, and, endeavouring to step aside from the track, she lost her balance and fell heavily to the ground. Turning her head at the same instant, Virginia beheld a horseman close upon them. The approach of the animal he rode had been quite inaudible upon the sandy hillocks, and he had recklessly galloped in their track without any warning, and would apparently have ridden them down, but for Nurse Tenby's accidental discovery that he was at hand. The horse reared and plunged as he was reined in, but having quieted him, the man dismounted hastily, and went to the old 'ady's assistance. Virginia was already helping her to rise to her feet, for she was not seriously hurt, only shaken by the fall.

'My good Mrs. Tenby, you dear old soul,' said the man, with a serio-comic air, as he put on her bonnet for her, and dusted the sand from her dress, 'pray accept my umble and sincere happology.'

Virginia looked at him reprovingly, and said he ought to have ridden with more care, but her face immediately relaxed into a smile on account of his droll appearance. His hat had fallen from his head, rolled down one of the hillocks, and lay half filled with sand. The roguish twinkle of his eye filled her with the suspicion that he had ridden so perilously near to them in a foolish frolic. His tongue was thrust into his cheek, and though he bowed very low to her, and renewed his apologies in a voluble manner, the young beauty saw the love and enjoyment of mischief lurking in every line of his countenance. Virginia thought his bare head the oddest and funniest she had ever seen; the brown hair was so short and thin behind, so bushy, stiff, and upright in front, that it reminded one of the ridiculous-looking caput of William the Conqueror as he is represented in the Bayeaux Tapestry. The face and figure were those of one past the prime of life, so that the delight in fun and mad pranks had long outlived the season when it is considered natural and appropriate. It was a droll face, and the merry blue eyes seemed all aflame with jocund vitality. The man went and picked up his unfortunate hat, tilted the sand out of it, replaced it on his head, saying pleasantly,

- 'I beg the young lady's pardon, with all my 'eart, and yours, my dear old friend.'
- 'Oh! Mr. Rollick,' said Nurse Tenby, with a glance of affectionate and humble reproach, 'what a fright you did give me, to be sure!'
- 'My 'orse is at times unmanageable, my good soul, and I really did not see you. Pray let me hassist you 'ome,' responded Mr. Rollick.
- 'So this is the surgeon we have been talking about,' thought Virginia. 'This is the man to whom I was intending to entrust a letter to my father and sister! He certainly does not impress me as being a very reliable character.'

Meanwhile, his hat stuck rakishly on one

side of his head, and his tongue in his cheek, Mr. Rollick led his horse by the bridle with one hand, and with the other supported Granny along the sandhills to her home. Virginia upheld the other arm of her old friend, and in this manner they reached 'Carr House,' as Nurse Tenby's abode was termed.

Granny had suffered no injury beyond a bruise or two, and that evening, when seated with Virginia by the fire, she confidentially told her all she knew about Mr. Rollick. He had run away from home when a boy, but had become errand lad to a physician in the north. In his surgery he had picked up some knowledge of medicine. Prosecuting his studies, he had managed at length to obtain a diploma. Ten years ago he had come to Slagthorpe, where he became popular with the poor, with whom he was willing to associate on equal terms, drinking, smoking, and cracking jokes. Of course this constant intercourse with ironworkers and other artisans had not improved his manners, which were those of a superior craftsman of defective education. He was a wild, strange man. As a boy he had fought more pitched battles, robbed more birds' nests, and hunted more rats than any urchin living. His escapades as a young man had been marvellous. He had ever avoided polite society, the young reprobate preferring to consort with mad fellows like himself. His love of sports—cricket, boating, shooting—was extreme, and he was oftener seen in a shooting coat with wide 'bulging' pockets than in any other costume.

Such was the middle-aged madcap now lodging under the same roof with the staid and beautiful Virginia.





CHAPTER V.

A WORTHY VICAR.

R. ROLLICK was a man of gallantry-he could not fail to take particular notice of a young and lovely girl newly arrived at the house in which he himself was a lodger. Virginia soon found his politeness quite overwhelming, and kept as much as possible in her own The surgeon was, however, able to render her an important service. When questioned by Nurse Tenby as to whether he knew of any family requiring a governess, he at once replied that he did-the vicar of Slagthorpe was seeking one for his children. Granny them told him in a few well-chosen words that Miss Eagles was the daughter of a very dear friend of hers, whom family troubles compelled to seek a situation. Would he kindly recommend the young lady, who was highly accomplished, to the vicar? Mr. Rollick said he would be delighted to do so. When making his rounds that day among his patients, he would call upon the reverend gentleman, and use his utmost endeavours to secure the situation for Miss Eagles.

Before the surgeon carries his purpose into execution, let the reader enter with us the well-furnished study in which Ambrose Wilton, the Vicar of Slagthorpe, is seated.

This model parish priest is before us! He is small and spare in person; his features are benignant; his hair has been bleached by hard thinking to a silvery whiteness; his age is about fifty-five. He is one of the very few clergymen of the present day who give themselves to hard reading. Mr. Wilton always insists that St. Paul's writings give evidence of the apostle's familiarity with Epimenides, Menander, Euripides, and the writings of the Platonists; and from the mention he makes of the 'tas membranas' left at Troas, he argues that St. Paul never travelled with-

out some few authors about him, as well as note-books of his own. The apostle did not rave; he reasoned: therefore he gave himself to careful study. A parish priest ought to be ever gaining knowledge from books as well as men, taking heed that this information was quickened by a spirit within him, making it profitable to his flock. This would enable him to abate difficulties, to subdue the refractory, to confirm the wavering, and to kindle the cold and overcautious.

Mr. Wilton was not only an earnest, fervid preacher, who declared the whole counsel of God, making his learning subservient and tributary to the cause in hand, but he was personally active among the people. Our vicar took more pleasure in pastoral intercourse with his parishioners than in hard study. The acquisition of his learning had cost him many weary days and sleepless nights. Wisdom had paled his cheeks, bent his form, turned his hair grey. He knew by experience that no labour is so intense or so fatiguing as the labour of the mind—that the search for knowledge is a work of

greater toil and trouble than the search for anything else. And how meagre its fruits! How ill does learning repay the care and solicitude expended in its pursuit! 'In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' In moments of weariness the parish priest would say, 'One would be inclined to think that the difficulty of the conquest would enhance the glory and pleasure of the triumph, but the truth is that this victory, like many others, may be bought too dear. It may be bought at the expense of our peace and tranquillity; at the expense of our honour and virtue; at the expense (in short) of our happiness. And who, in either of these circumstances, will compliment us on our choice, or who will envy us the purchase? Mark the ignorant and illiterate part of mankind. Do they not taste the benefits of nature, and enjoy the common blessings of life with more spirit and cheerfulness than the grave and learned, whose brows are knit with care, and whose avenues to joy are shut up with thoughtfulness and solicitude? The studious man often laments that knowledge which makes him grave. He finds after all his labours that he has only been indefatigable in the pursuit of misery, or to procure anxiety. Nay! sometimes he is obliged, in spite of his pride and superiority, to wish for that ignorance he despises, and to envy that folly he condemns.'

Stigmatising, then, his own erudition as vanity and vexation of spirit, even while he assiduously cultivated it, our pattern clergyman laboured to make men happier and better by his zealous and discreet pastoral oversight of them. In this he showed an unfailing, sometimes an unrequited, perseverance; yet in all emergencies he was courteous and temperate. He made no attempt at popular or temporary effect, but was sober, grave, and consistent. In his preaching, men would discover nothing of that spirit which delights in doing violence to the feelings of an audience, and takes its pastime in communicating offensive truths in the most offensive manner. He ever showed tenderness, delicacy, and solicitude to spare all unnecessary pain, involving himself in his censure of others. Yet his was not a tame spirit;

he could be courageous and wrathful when necessary; only, being desirous that his work should be deep and lasting rather than extended imposing and unsound, he deemed it more apostolic to temper zeal with prudence. The headstrong, inconsiderate zealot who would encourage niceties in religion that only serve for the colours of a sect, nursing them into importance by undue and disproportionate attention, and thus stealing away men's minds from the far weightier considerations of judgment, mercy, faith, and love,—such a fanatic, in Mr. Wilton's opinion, could find no countenance for his mischievous folly in the conduct of either St. Paul or our Lord Himself.

One morning the vicar was seated in his study chair, poring over a Hebrew Bible, when the door was pushed open by the maid-servant, and Mr. Rollick announced.

The surgeon entered immediately, habited in a shooting-coat, the pockets of which were apparently filled with game. There was a roguish gleam in his blue eyes, and he looked as rakish as ever. Advancing to the writing-table where the clergyman sat, he shook him warmly by the hand, saying,—

'My very good sir! and how are you this fine mornin'? Immersed in your books as usual, my dear friend? Ah! Hebrew, I see! Them Shemitic languages is grand! I used to study 'em when a youth. Learning Hebrew was a passion with me in them days. I remember it fine.'

Mr. Rollick was not exactly telling falsehoods. It is a remarkable fact, that in some mysterious manner he had gained a smattering in several learned languages-a preference being given to the Oriental group. Hieroglyphics he was supposed to decipher with ease. Perhaps it was this strange predilection which filled him with the desire he had so often expressed to become a clergyman. Certainly he always maintained that he ought to have entered the Church. His friends, knowing his wild, harum-scarum mode of life, laughed among themselves, and tried to reason him out of his delusion—but in vain. Rollick liked to have a chat with the parish priest on the subject of the Eastern tongues, and the latter, on his part, was glad of such an intelligent and sympathetic listener.

'I thought you might perhaps like a trifle in

this way, sir,' continued the surgeon, pulling a brace of partridges out of his pockets and laying them on the table. 'You are heartily welcome.'

'How kind you are, Mr. Rollick! Thank you very much,' said the delighted vicar, and then they plunged into a profound conversation touching the subject dear to them both.

'I have been reading,' said Mr. Wilton, 'about the giving of the manna to the children of Israel. In our English version the passage is translated very badly,—"When they saw it, they said one to another, It is manna, for they wist not what it was." Now if we understand that man-hu simply means, "What is it?" the verse is at all events no longer unintelligible, and the end of it no longer in apparent contradiction to the beginning.'

'My good sir, I agree with you,' said the surgeon, smiling, and fingering his fowlingpiece lovingly.

Mr. Wilton reached down Gesenius's Hebrew Grammar, and he and his friend became busy over a comparative table of ancient alphabets, pointing out to one another points of similarity in the Phænician, Arabic, Ethiopic, and so on.

'However dissimilar the Shemitic written

characters may appear now,' said the clergyman, 'they have undoubtedly all come by various modifications from one and the same original alphabet.'

'Of which the truest copy now extant is the Phœnician,' said Rollick, dusting his gun with his silk handkerchief. 'My tutor told me so when I was a boy. I remember it fine. To my mind, the study of philology is the noblest occupation on earth—except rat-catching,' he added under his breath.

'It is my favourite pursuit,' rejoined the parish priest, referring, it is presumed, to philology, not rat-catching.

'I envy you. How often have I wished that the Fates had made me a clergyman. I never liked drugs and splints—it was always my wish to take 'oly horders.'

- 'Indeed!'
- 'It was, my good friend, I assure you,' protested Rollick.
 - 'You surprise me.'
- 'May I ask why you should feel surprised at such a wish on my part?'
 - 'Well, I thought-'

- 'Yes, my dear sir, tell me plainly. I shall be glad to know.'
- 'I thought it was too humdrum a life to have taken your fancy,' said the vicar, with a smile.
 - 'Did you?'
- 'Really and truly I did. You love an active, out-of-door existence, and I never thought you at all seriously inclined either.'
- 'My good sir, I ought to have entered the Church. Your sacred callin' always had great attractions for me. My friends continually opposed my wishes, but I still think myself more fitted for that than anythin' else.'

It was such talk as this which made those intimate with Rollick declare (as they frequently did) that his mind was not quite sound. If he had a special fitness for any pursuit besides that of a surgeon, it was the calling of a head gamekeeper. Mr. Wilton had too much delicacy to tell him so, but the conviction was in his mind nevertheless. He was about to change the subject, when his visitor said somewhat abruptly,

'Pardon me, my good sir; I believe you are seeking a governess?'

- 'I am,' replied the clergyman.
- 'You have advertised?' continued Mr. Rollick.
 - 'Yes.'
- 'But have not come to terms as yet with any happlicant?'
- 'I have not found one at all suitable,' was Mr. Wilton's rejoinder, as he looked at him in surprise.
- 'Then, my very dear friend,' cried the surgeon triumphantly, 'I can tell you of one that will suit you to a T.'
 - 'Yes? Who is it?'
- 'A young lady now stayin' at Carr House. She is a connection, I believe, of Mrs. Tenby's, my landlady.'
 - 'What is her name?'
 - 'Virginia Eagles.'
- 'How old is she?' asked the vicar, beginning to be interested.
 - 'I believe about twenty-two.'
 - 'Do you know her family?'
- 'No; but of course Mrs. Tenby does,' said Rollick.
 - 'Where does she come from?'
 - 'The south.'

- 'But what town?' asked Mr. Wilton, with a grave smile.
- 'I can't say; but Mrs. Tenby can give you full information on that and other points. I myself have only been acquainted with the young lady for a few days, but she is a very superior person—one who has evidently moved in a higher station than that of her old friend. She is seekin' a good home with a quiet religious family; and wages, I believe, is no hobject.'

Now the parish priest was poor, and this last observation caused him to hope that the young lady in question might prove suitable. 'I never decide these matters,' he said, 'without reference to Mrs. Wilton. Of course, Miss—'

- 'Eagles,' suggested the surgeon.
- 'Thank you.—Miss Eagles, I hope, will call upon my wife. In the meantime, may I ask you kindly to step into the other room and name it to her? She will be glad to see you if you can spare the time.'
 - 'I will, with pleasure, my dear friend.'

They then left the study together, in search of Mrs. Wilton.



CHAPTER VI.

'SING US A COMIC SONG!'

HEY found Mrs. Wilton in the sitting-room engaged in some homely knitting. She rose as they entered, and took the surgeon's outstretched hand very cordially in her own. He was the family doctor, you see, and an old friend of her husband's.

Her figure was tall, matronly, and dignified. She was evidently much younger than the vicar, and was still exceedingly comely, with noble features, of which the great charm lay rather in their wondrous mobility than in their regularity of form. No painter, indeed, could do justice to the rare sweetness of their expression.

'Our friend Mr. Rollick has heard of a young person suitable as governess, my dear,'

said the clergyman, when they were all seated, and the usual commonplaces had been exchanged.

- 'Has he, indeed? I am delighted to hear it. How kind of you to take so much interest in the matter,' she said, smiling gratefully at the middle-aged surgeon.
- 'Not at all, Mrs. Wilton,' said Rollick politely. 'Proud to be of any service, my dear madam, I am sure. The young lady,' he continued, in a rich, full-toned voice, 'is almost an entire stranger to me.'
- 'Oh!' was Mrs. Wilton's exclamation of disappointment.
- 'Miss Eagles (that is her name) only arrived at Carr House two days ago, and until then I had never seen or heard of her.'
- 'Why did Miss Eagles come to Carr House?' asked the vicar's wife.
- 'I imagine that Mrs. Tenby is her aunt or grandmother, or some relation of that kind. There was family trouble at 'ome, and she left and came here seekin' a situation,' replied the surgeon.
 - 'Is she fond of children?'
 - 'Very; and quite a superior person for

her station in life, I assure you. She impressed me most favourably. Her appearance is exceedingly prepossessin'. I believe she is desirous to find a 'ome in a clergyman's family,' said Rollick, careful to mention such particulars as were likely to have a good effect upon his hearers, whether they were exact or not.

- 'My children are so wild--'
- 'Quite incorrigible,' murmured the parish priest, interrupting his wife, and shaking his snowy head in a mournful manner.
- 'They are very unruly, indeed, Mr. Rollick,' the fond mother continued with a smile. 'I want some one who will be firm as well as kind,—some one who can control and curb their boisterous manners.'
- 'Miss Eagles is the very person, ma'am,' said the surgeon persuasively.
 - 'Do you think so?'
- 'I am sure of it, ma'am; for, though the young lady is mild and quiet as a dove, there is yet so much helegance, grace, and dignity 'about her, and so much decision, that she would not only gain the love of children—she would make them obey 'er.'

- 'That is the kind of governess I want, Mr. Rollick,' said the vicar's wife.
- 'It is, my dear madam. If such a governess had been placed over me when I was a boy, I shouldn't have grown up the wild random fellow I am. They never controlled me—I remember it fine! I cared for nothing but birds-nesting—they couldn't make me learn my lessons. Mischief was my delight in them early days.'
 - 'And it is still-eh?' remarked Mr. Wilton.
- 'You are right, my dear sir—it is still. I am nothing better than a Bohemian. I have led a roving life—and it suits me. Being a bachelor, I 'can spend my time as I please.'

The surgeon described his own character exactly. Though nearly fifty, the fire of his youth was not only unquenched; it burned as fiercely as ever. He was the ringleader in all the sports and games around Winterham and Slagthorpe. A boon companion everywhere, he was the idol of the working classes. He had as much love of adventure as any boy in the county of Durham. Had his means pervitted, he would have been off to hunt the

tiger in India, the giraffe in Africa, or the kangaroo in Australia.

- 'I saw you yesterday peering into a stack of peasticks at the bottom of your garden,' said the vicar. 'Were you looking for a bird's nest?'
 - 'I was-and I found one, too!'
- 'Ah! you know by instinct where they are to be sought for,' laughed Mrs. Wilton.
- 'I think so, ma'am; but though you might suppose I was cut out for nothin' better than a bird-fancier or a game-keeper, I ought really to have been made a parson. That's the vocation I was meant for. I ought to have took 'oly horders—then I should ha' been happy. When a lad it was my great ambition—I remember it fine! But I wasn't brought up right, and the governess never could master me. For that reason I say have a governess that will be firm as well as kind. Miss Eagles is just the sort you want, my dear madam.'

The vicar's wife thought very probably she was, but of course she could judge better upon that point when she had seen the young person and held some conversation with her.

'You see, Mr. Rollick,' said she, wishing

that he should carry a favourable report of the situation on his return home, 'the duties of a governess in my family are not at all heavy.'

'Oh! dear no, my dear madam!'

'Bob, the eldest, is seven,' pursued Mrs. Wilton, thoughtfully. 'He is backward with his lessons, but then the child has been so careless and idle. She will find him very quick to learn; and in a short time his papa means to send him out to school—don't you, Ambrose?'

The vicar said 'Yes, certainly, after the lad had been grounded a little.'

'The other two children,' continued his wife, 'will give Miss Eagles very little trouble. May is a dear good girl, quite docile and obedient, and Harold, aged three, is of course too young to be taught anything, unless it be the alphabet, and a hymn or two.'

'Quite so, my dear madam.'

'It is highly desirable,' said Mr. Wilton, 'that the young lady should also be a teacher in one of my Sunday schools. I have two under my care, you know—one of them at Black Hill, just on the outskirts of my parish. Her help is greatly needed there.'

The poor vicar found the population of Slagthorpe increasing so rapidly, that he was hard pressed to supply its spiritual wants. Thirty years previously it had been a small secluded village, containing no inhabitants more sophisticated than plodding agriculturists and laborious fisher-folk. But since then, Winterham, an entirely new town, had been built at its northern extremity, and had extended its limits almost to the very church doors. The shipbuilding and iron trades had brought thousands of Irish, Scotch, and Welsh craftsmen into the parish. Moreover, a clever financier and pushing ironmaster had built large rolling mills and blast furnaces at Black Hill, to the south of Slagthorpe, bringing another flood of immigrants, who had transformed the once quiet peaceful village into a Pandemonium. of the simplicity of rural life, the vicar encountered vice, blasphemy, and drunkenness. wages had multiplied the ale-houses and ginpalaces, the balance of the workmen's earnings being expended in champagne, bull dogs, and greyhounds, the latter being led out into the fields every Sunday morning by a crowd of

roughs, some of whom carried rabbits in a basket, to be coursed by the dogs.

We must say of Slagthorpe, therefore, and of Winterham too, in a less degree, that though it was an extremely dull place, it was by no means respectable, being in that particular the very opposite and antipodes of Davenstone, whence our heroine, Virginia Eagles, had taken her flight for the sake of Charles Dangerfield. In Winterham and the neighbourhood the 'Illustrated Police News' and the 'penny dreadfuls' were not relegated to the back streets; the churches and chapels were not filled on the Sunday; the inhabitants were not well-dressed and orderly, and the thoroughfares were not clean and safe. Mr. Wilton did his utmost to work some improvement among the people. He induced the ironmaster, who had got into Parliament, to build a school-room for his workpeople at Black Hill. But it had hardly been roofed in before the clever financier became a bankrupt, accepted the Chiltern Hundreds, and wrote a letter to the vicar stating that since his rolling mills and blast furnaces were about to be closed, he must withdraw his subscriptions. The poor parish priest now had the responsibility of finding the schoolmaster's salary (which the ironmaster had *promised* to pay), and also of maintaining the services in the room. It was this building Mr. Wilton referred to when he said 'I have a school at Black Hill, on the outskirts of my overgrown parish. Her help is greatly needed there.'

'Then, I am sure, my dear sir,' said Mr. Rollick, 'that Miss Eagles will gladly make herself useful in that neighbourhood.'

At this moment a scuffle, attended with much clamour, was heard in the passage outside. A boyish voice rang out some word of command, followed by the rattling of sticks one against the other.

'Those children again!' cried Mrs. Wilton. 'They will not keep in their nursery. They are always rushing in here, on some pretext, at all hours of the day.'

The door was burst violently open, and the young rebels poured into the room in a tumultuous manner.

'What are you urchins up to, now?' asked the vicar.

'Oh! dad!' cried Bob, the eldest, 'such fun!' He was a bright, joyous youngster of

seven, upright and healthy, and with eyes flashing with eagerness. 'See us fight!' he shouted, brandishing some darts in his left hand. He had covered his body with the hairy skin of some animal, the claws of which were sticking out here and there. 'I am Apollyon, you know, otherwise Beelzebub!' said he, rattling his darts and straddling his legs. 'Have at you!' and he made a fierce lunge at sister May. She was a gentle, fair-haired child of some five years, wielding a wooden sword, and carrying a rude shield on her left arm. Harold, the youngest, stood looking on, eyes and mouth wide open in silent admiration.

'Why, Bob,' inquired the surgeon, slyly, 'wherever *did* you make acquaintance with the old gentleman you have just mentioned?'

'Oh, in the Pilgrim's Progress, you know. Haven't you read about his fight with Christian? I will run and fetch the book to show you!' Off he went like a shot, returning the next minute with two copies of Bunyan's immortal allegory, one of them printed upon flimsy paper and in strange characters.

- 'What language is this?' asked Rollick.
- 'Oh, Chinese, you know. Of course I can't read it, but I thought you would like to see the pictures. See this one—Christian with a pigtail running to the wicket gate.'
 - 'And what is this?'
- 'Oh! that is where he gets to the Interpreter's house; and this is where he loses his roll. He had slept, you know, in the arbour, and left it behind him. And all the pictures are done by Chinese artists. But the other book is so funny,—let me show it you.'
- 'That copy,' said Mrs. Wilton, 'has been in my family for generations. I well remember how profoundly I was impressed as a child by those rough, uncouth woodcuts. Though they look hideous now, they were most beautiful to me then, and we children used to kiss them rapturously.'
- 'We love them, too, mamma,' cried Bob, as he turned over the faded leaves, recounting with much pride and importance the different scenes and incidents in the pilgrim's life.

Just then the children espied the gun in the corner, and flew to examine it. 'Papa don't shoot,' said Bob, 'but I could. I should like to knock the partridges over.'

The surgeon took little May and Harold upon his knees, and began to chat to them in his droll way.

'Sing us a comic song, Mr. Rollick!' said Bob the pert one, 'or else tell us a story, please. Your stories are jolly ones.'

The surgeon recounted the marvellous adventures of an eastern potentate, who experienced more vicissitudes, he said, than Sinbad himself. The vicar's son and heir listened intently but critically, for he knew the six voyages by heart, and all about the Forty Thieves, and the rest of it.

'Grimm's tales are the best, though,' said Bob, when he had ended his recital. 'The Four Tailors is good, isn't it? I say, ma, when shall we have a governess? She would read lots to us, and it would be such fun! Nobody ever reads to us now.'

'Oh! you ungrateful boy!'

'Well, very seldom, I'm sure,' said young hopeful, in a lower tone. 'Don't go, Mr. Rollick, you are so delightful. You spin long yarns for us, and never get tired.'

'But I have my patients to see, old man,' said the surgeon, moving towards the door.

'Well, Mr. Rollick,' said the vicar's wife, as they shook hands, 'I hope you will get Miss Eagles to call very soon, for I need some one at once to look after the children. They are so outrageously noisy and turbulent—they overleap all bounds, and deride all restraint. Good-bye!'





CHAPTER VII.

THE GOVERNESS.

IRGINIA did not know what earnest efforts Charles Dangerfield was making all this time to discover the place of her retreat. Had she been aware of those endeavours, she would have prayed most earnestly that his quest might not have a successful issue, since she was so fully persuaded of the illegality of the marriage ceremony, that she desired to keep apart from him henceforward. And vet she loved him passionately still, and remembered him in her devotions night and day. Nor had she any doubt of the sincerity of Charles' affection. But, the confession he had made two days subsequently to the wedding, brought the unfaltering conviction to our heroine's mind that it would be best

for him and for her that they should never meet again.

Equally ignorant was Virginia of the anxious search instituted by her father. She had been traced to London, but there he had been baffled; and though the stout Yorkshireman had not relaxed his efforts, but on the contrary continued the quest with redoubled energy, her whereabouts was a profound mystery up to the present hour. How near Valentine Laxey had been to seeing and recognising her (though he had no knowledge of her flight) she did not learn till afterwards. The Councillor actually walked past Mr. Wilton's door ten minutes after our heroine-all unconscious of her frolicsome friend's proximity-had entered it in order to apply for the vacant situation.

Virginia's yearning love of her old home found expression in the two letters—one of them to her sister and the other to the mayor—which she despatched by the hand of Mr. Rollick. The surgeon left Slagthorpe the day after his interview with the vicar; and while the train waited at the Davenstone railway station, he dropped the letters into the

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post-office there, and then pursued his journey to Leamington. It is a wonder he had not forgotten to execute this little commission, for Rollick was not the most trustworthy person imaginable; and, besides, he was hampered with impedimenta in the shape of nine paper parcels containing presents for Mrs. Rollick, in addition to a hedgehog and a tame fox. But when Beauty commands, even a middle-aged Bohemian must needs obey—and obey cheerfully too!

As we have before intimated, Virginia called at the vicarage to apply for the vacant situation. She was accompanied by Nurse Tenby; and the result of the interview with Mrs. Wilton was, that our heroine was engaged by her to be the children's governess.

'Granny' had been very discreet,—at least in her own opinion. She persuaded Virginia to say nothing about the marriage, but simply to state that family troubles had compelled her to leave home. Nurse Tenby took care to tell the vicar's wife that Miss Eagles had behaved very properly in the matter, but that for certain weighty reasons it was advisable not to mention particulars. Mrs.

Wilton thought a good deal of the old lady's recommendation, but more of Mr. Rollick's, and, most of all was she influenced by the personal appearance of the young applicant. Virginia was dressed with the utmost plainness, as befitted her fallen fortunes and altered circumstances; but her pensive face, so lovely and yet so sad, her quiet, sedate, dignified, and ladylike bearing, her gentle manners and low sweet voice,—these were all-prevailing passports to Mrs. Wilton's favour. The latter perceived, too, as soon as she conversed with our heroine, that she was a refined, welleducated girl. Finally, the good woman was touched by the expression of patient sorrow which sat upon the applicant's features, awakening not only her sympathy, but her curiosity as well.

Then, again, it must not be forgotten that the vicar was poor; his wife therefore was glad to obtain such a governess as Miss Eagles was likely to prove, upon such easy terms. Virginia herself, who had been accustomed in her father's house to much of the elegance and luxury which wealth can procure, could scarcely help smiling, notwith-

standing her troubles and anxieties, at the make-shifts apparent in Mrs. Wilton's sitting-room. It was barely and poorly furnished, and not even water-tight. Out of doors a heavy shower of rain was falling, and large drops were pouring thick and fast through the roof of the large bay window, and splashing upon the floor almost at our heroine's feet.

'Yes, the room is always deluged in wet weather, Miss Eagles,' said Mrs. Wilton apologetically. 'Draw your chair farther this way.'

Virginia gathered up her skirts, looking ruefully at five basons, three tubs, and a dripping-pan, which had been placed on the carpet to catch the falling shower.

'Dear me! it's very unpleasant,' said the vicar's wife, rolling up the edge of the carpet and kicking it into a drier region. 'Mr. Wilton has had the plumbers and carpenters to that window again and again, and they can't prevent the leakage. Bring your seat this way, Mrs. Tenby. There—that is better.'

The good woman shifted the positions of the basons and the dripping-pan, in order that they might more effectually receive the descending rain, and then resumed her seat.

Well, after some further conversation, the terms upon which our heroine was to hold the office of governess in the family were arranged to the satisfaction of all the parties, and then Virginia and her humble friend left the vicarage, on the understanding that the former should commence her duties on the following day.

Mr. Wilton was out at the time the above interview took place, but on his return home he was pleased that the engagement had been entered into, particularly as his wife spoke in high terms of the young person by whom the situation had been accepted. As to Master Bob, and May, and Harold, they clapped their hands with delight, declaring they 'were sure they should love Miss Eagles' (to whom their mother had introduced them), 'because she looked so kind, and because she was a friend of Mr. Rollick's.'

Nor did the youngsters prove false prophets, for Virginia had not been an inmate of the vicarage many days before they became passionately fond of her; while Mr. and Mrs. Wilton,

on their part, were not long in perceiving a decided improvement in regard to their children's knowledge and manners. The handsome governess did not allow her young charges to neglect their lessons, nor was she slow to detect and point out to them their respective faults and failings; but at the same time she was always ready to assist and amuse them, mending their toys, comforting them in their little troubles, reading fairy tales, telling them stories, and in other ways devoting herself to her new duties with patience and assiduity.

One day, lessons being over in the school-room, she took the little people out for a walk to see the docks and the shipping at Winterham. It was a glorious afternoon, and it was arranged that they should have tea, pic-nic fashion, upon the sandhills by the sea-shore. When they reached the town, they walked about on the quays, and in a shipbuilder's yard, where an immense screw steamer was in course of construction upon the slips. Master Bob paraded, with much pride, his knowledge upon the subject of brigs, schooners, fishing smacks, and steam tugs; and as they watched different

vessels making their way into port or anchored in the offing, he told the governess that he knew the flags of all nations. Most of the ships, he said, came from Russia, Denmark, and Sweden. They saw several steamers unload their cargoes—flax, hemp, grain, timber, and many other things.

They then left the town and strolled upon the beach. Seating themselves upon a sandy hillock in the shade of a life-boat house, they idly watched the light clouds floating in the sky, the ever-changing hues of the sapphire sea, and the white-winged ships and sturdy steamers that glided on its surface. The air was still, almost oppressive, the sun intensely hot, and they were glad of the cool shelter of the life-boat house.

To wile away the time Virginia told them about Ulysses ploughing the sandy shore with oxen.

- 'That was silly,' said Master Bob. 'What did he do it for?'
- 'He had just been married,' replied the governess, 'and did not want to have to go to the wars. He wished to be thought mad.'

'What a coward he was,' said Bob contemptuously. 'I should like to go to the wars!'

Then Virginia ransacked what little Scandinavian lore she possessed, and related how the stout Vikings of old sailed across that very sea and landed in that very harbour.

'I suppose,' said she, 'some of these people around us have descended from those northern pirate kings who infested this coast a great many years ago.'

She also told them about Andromache and the sea monster, while the children lay on their backs watching the clouds.

- 'I say, Miss Eagles,' said little Harold, when she had finished, and they had been silent a minute or two, 'does God keep little boxes in the sky to put the sun and moon in?'
- 'Well no, dear, not exactly,' she replied, and proceeded to explain, as well as she was able, that branch of astronomical science.

'You little goose,' said Master Bob.

May kissed the tiny querist, telling him it was right of him to wish to improve his mind.

'I thought,' said Harold, 'that God kept

the snow and the rain in boxes too. You know I have to put my playthings away like that.'

- 'Yes, darling,' said May, 'but God can do everything. He made us all.'
- 'Well then,' pursued Harold, still thirsting for information, 'did God cut the world out with a knife? Did he cut out the trees and the flowers, and the sea, and the animals, and the fishes with a sharp knife, like Bob makes his little boat?'

Here was another difficulty! However, after a time they managed to satisfy and quiet this troublesome young disciple, and then they proceeded to spread their tea things upon a clean white napkin, and to enjoy their meal. When it was ended it was time to go home, for it was growing dusk.

On reaching the vicarage the children besought our heroine to tell them one more story before they went to bed.

'I like your tales, Miss Eagles,' said Master Bob, 'almost as much as Grimm's. But some of his are jolly. I remember all about the silver palace, and the robbers in their den. The Magic Fiddle and the Enchanted Tree are the best.' 'Oh no!' said May timidly; 'I think "Snow White and Rose Red" the prettiest. I do so wish the little sister had not gathered the twelve lilies out of the garden, don't you, Miss Eagles?'

It was growing dark rapidly as they sat in the sitting-room downstairs, talking in low tones. Mr. and Mrs. Wilton were both out, so Virginia and the children were alone together.

'Oh! I forgot!' said Master Bob. 'I know now which is the best story of all; it is "The Youth who could not Shiver and Shake."'

'What a funny title,' said the governess.
'Can you tell me about that remarkable youth?'

'Why, nothing could frighten him, you know, he was so brave,' returned Bob, with flashing eyes. 'All kinds of dreadful things happened, enough to make other people's flesh creep and curdle their blood; but this young man was a regular brick. He killed off all the ghosts, and defeated all his enemies, and at last married the princess. I am like that youth,' concluded Master Bob. 'Nothing

can frighten me; I never can shiver and shake.'

'Miss Eagles,' said May, in a soft tone of entreaty, 'you will read it to us now, won't you?'

'Well, where is the book?'

'Up in the nursery,' replied Bob, in a low voice.

'If you will go and fetch the book downstairs,' said Virginia to him, 'I will read it to you.'

'But it is so dark!' replied the young Paladin. 'If May will come with me I will go. I never like to be by myself in the dark.'

'It makes you shiver and shake, does it?' laughed Virginia. 'Well, you can go with him, May.'

They fetched the book, and she read the story to them; after which, for Master Bob's benefit, she related the sad adventures of Ixion. Then she put them to bed.

'Farmer Thorpe's dog, Bouncer, is dead, Miss Eagles,' said May, when she was undressed, and had said her prayers. 'He was poisoned—poor Bouncer! I miss him very much. I would like to know where he is

buried, that I might lay a wreath of roses upon his grave.'

- 'Mr. Rollick's dog is dead too,' added Bob, not to be behind in information.
- 'And, Miss Eagles,' said little Harold, 'my grandmother is dead.'
- 'You little silly,' said his brother, 'you mean your grandmother's dog is dead. Papa had a letter this morning, Miss Eagles, and it said they had drowned it.'
- 'There is a high rate of mortality among the quadrupeds here,' thought Virginia. 'Well, good night, my darlings, good night!'





CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. WILTON'S NEW TRIAL.

IVE uneventful months glided by, and Virginia was still an inmate of Mr. Wilton's house. The search for her that was being vigorously prosecuted, both by Charles Dangerfield and by her father, had as yet been fruitless, simply because they were working on a false scent, in the persuasion that the lost girl was hiding either in London or on the Continent. There were times when the yearning for home was so strong that she was on the point of revealing the place of her retreat to her father; and she would have done so had she been able to devise some other means whereby Charles might be shielded. She pondered the subject in her mind continually, but always came to this conclusion, namely, that she must sacrifice herself in order to preserve her secret, which could only be divulged at the expense of Charles' safety.

It was now winter-time. The bleak, waste places around Slagthorpe and Winterham were a picture of gloom and desolation. East winds had prevailed in the neighbourhood for many weeks, accompanied by dismal, drenching rain. Even the good vicar, whose labours were incessant among his parishioners, felt the depressing influence of the season. Returning home one day after a round of visits to some ironworkers' families, among whom he had witnessed to an unusual extent the evil effects of drunkenness and vice, he cast himself wearily into a chair, saying to his wife,—

'My heart aches, Martha, when I go round my parish; it is so different to the peaceful, smiling village of thirty years back. So far as Slagthorpe is concerned, our modern progress has been a hideous monster, spreading havoc and ugliness over smiling fields and sweet woodlands. It has given us vile food under false names; it has made people mad, drunken, unreasonable, discontented, sensual, and devilish.'

'Oh, Ambrose!'

- 'It has, Martha. I say, Englishmen have to pay dearly for their boasted superiority over other nations in regard to material wealth. Other countries have been wiser than we. They have, by an act of the legislature, restricted the power of 'pushing people' to deface the country with mines and manufactories. They have determined to keep their streams unpolluted, their woods and meadows in all their natural beauty; but we, in order to become rich, have sacrificed the loveliness of nature, and also a considerable portion of our honesty, our religion, and our poetry.'
- 'But, Ambrose,' said his wife, 'the resources of the country must be developed, you know, or else our rapidly increasing population would go unfed and unclothed.'
- 'A fallacy, Martha! Of course we need a healthy, reasonable progress; but ours has been a feverish scramble for money—it has been a saturnalia, a debauch, a nightmare! In Winterham and Slagthorpe you have two parishes grown suddenly rich. Now a gradual, steady prosperity would have been a blessing

to us: but our unexpected leap into the lap of luxury has been a curse; the moral and social condition of the people—their health and happiness—are at a low standard. To develop the resources of the country, Martha, and to promote its commercial greatness, forsooth! we have covered the land with a vast congeries of factories, mines, furnaces, and heaps of refuse; we have filled it with poisonous vapours, and polluted our rivers and streams with abominations which first sicken and then kill! Are we not losers by the change?'

- 'Perhaps we are, Ambrose.'
- 'I am sure of it. In thus subordinating our social and moral well-being to our commercial interests—sacrificing our higher nature to the Moloch of wealth—we have acted the part of fools and madmen.'
 - 'Your language is too strong, Ambrose.'
- 'Not a bit too strong, Martha. I have witnessed scenes to-day which make my blood boil. The evil passions at work, the depraved appetites indulged, in this parish, fill my soul with horror. And to a large extent this state of things is a direct consequence of our so-called *progress*. The working-classes in Slag-

thorpe are, with a few exceptions, sensual, brutal, and vicious. As to our shopkeepers—for butter they give me vile fats, and for sugar, sand! In our factories there is a cunning manufacture of shoddy in preference to a well-made, serviceable and trustworthy article. The foreigner is finding it out too! Vulgarity and irreligion sit enthroned in high places, and the language of our local press (I speak of Slagthorpe and Winterham) is either frivolous or abusive. The worship of Mammon has made us unaccustomed to feel the thrill of noble sentiments, or to display much public spirit; in short, the prosperity of the last twenty years has demoralised us.'

Mrs. Wilton was here called away to attend to some household duty, and her husband, feeling somewhat relieved in mind by his recent deliverance, betook himself to his study. He had remained here considerably more than two hours, absorbed in his reading, and quite oblivious to what was passing elsewhere under his own roof, when the study door was opened, and his wife entered the room.

'Martha, what is the matter?' said he

gravely, as he looked up and saw the deep trouble depicted upon her countenance.

Mrs. Wilton closed the door behind her without speaking, and even took the precaution to turn the key in the lock. Her manner and the expression of her face told her husband quite plainly that she had news to communicate of an unusually painful nature.

'Something has happened,' said Mr. Wilton, rising from his chair as his wife approached him. 'Is anything wrong with the children?'

'No; it is Miss Eagles.'

The vicar thought at first that she had probably been taken suddenly ill. He kept his eyes upon his wife, who seemed to divine the current of his reflections, for she shook her head, saying,

'It is not that. She is going to leave us, Ambrose!'

'Going to leave us!' echoed Mr. Wilton. 'Why?'

His wife did not answer the question directly, but a faint colour suffused her cheeks as she said, 'Miss Eagles has told me she thinks she had better resign her situation as governess here, and—I think so too.'

'How mysterious you are, Martha. What has she done? You speak as though she was in fault about something.'

'God forbid that I should judge or condemn her,' answered Mrs. Wilton solemnly, 'but for her own sake, and for the sake of her unborn child—to say nothing of ourselves, it would be well for her to return home to her friends.'

The vicar's countenance fell, but it was eloquent with sympathy and commiseration.

'When she came here five months ago,' continued Mrs. Wilton, 'we knew that family troubles had compelled her to leave home. It now appears that a little while before, some gentleman whose name she will not mention, made her an offer of marriage—'

- 'Poor girl! Yes?'
- 'She accepted him, and the marriage ceremony was duly performed by a clergyman of the Church of England in one of the churches in London.'
 - 'Well; go on. That is better!'
- 'They went off together to spend the honeymoon abroad, having been united with

the sanction and in the presence of their relatives and friends. But two or three days subsequently her eyes were opened by an unexpected and most startling revelation that the gentleman made to her, producing the persuasion in her mind that she was not his wife after all—only a mistress.'

'Another case of bigamy,' said the parish priest, laconically.

'That was the conclusion I came to,' returned his wife, 'but I cannot say positively, because Miss Eagles maintains complete silence upon that point. However, having every reason to believe that the marriage ceremony was null and void, she immediately returned to her father's house.'

'Very right and proper, too,' said Mr. Wilton. 'Has she told you where her home is?'

'No; she still insists on keeping it secret. You know she has always been reserved from the first in regard to some particulars of her past life, and the names of her acquaintance in the south of England. I have never pressed her closely, having a delicacy in intruding upon subjects that were painful to her. But there is no doubt that

the gentleman I referred to is answerable for the poor girl's present trouble.'

- 'Did her father cast her off?'
- 'Oh! no! But he demanded that she should reveal to him the purport of the confession she said had been made to her. She refused, on the ground that she wished to shield rather than to ruin her betrayer.'
 - 'She loves him, then?'
- 'I fear she loves him too well. However, she is hiding from him now, for she prays that she may never see his face again. She fled from her father's house partly to prevent her lover from finding her, and partly to escape from the urgent entreaties and reproachful glances which distressed her, and rendered home miserable to all the inmates.'
 - 'But now she wishes to go home?'
- 'It is the best place for her; but I am not sure that her mind is made up on that point. I fancy she wishes to go to Nurse Tenby for a little while, until her future course is decided on.'
 - 'But she will not leave here immediately?'
- 'She desires to do so as soon as possible,' replied his wife. 'I shall not hurry her away,

you may be sure. I still believe her to be a virtuous, high-minded girl, and I deeply grieve over her misfortune.'

- 'Yes, indeed.'
- 'Of course, Ambrose,' said Mrs. Wilton, seriously, 'I have thought for a long time that all was not right with her. I have frequently found her in tears. Once she fainted away in the schoolroom. But though I had fears and suspicions on other accounts as well, yet I never breathed them to you, because I was ashamed that they had entered my mind. "Charity thinketh no evil," I said to myself. Miss Eagles impressed me as being pure, unselfish, and good. I dared not believe that she had been led astray.'

The vicar kissed his wife, saying, 'It was like you, Martha.'

- 'Was it? Well, do you know, Ambrose, I still hold firmly to the conviction that she is pure and virtuous; and always shall do, I hope.'
- 'We cannot think there is any stain upon so good a girl,' rejoined Mr. Wilton firmly.
- 'No; I told her so; and she was comforted. It came about thus:—When I looked into the

nursery she was alone, and again in tears. While we were talking, a death-like faintness came over her. It was some time before I could restore her to consciousness. Afterwards she revealed her trouble to me, with many sighs and much difficulty. And now, Ambrose, I have told you all, said Mrs. Wilton, sitting down upon a chair, and beginning to sob as if her heart would break.

Well, reader, we must be spared any further recital of this sad scene. We must also pass over the parting between Virginia and these good people, which took place about three weeks afterwards. How the children clung to her, and wept, and begged and prayed her not to leave them, must be left to the imagination. And Virginia's grief—our pen refuses to dwell upon it. Let her pass from this abode of peace and goodwill with our heartfelt wishes for her future welfare!





CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE IRONWORKERS.

HE departure of the governess created a void in the family circle at the vicarage, which was not likely to be easily filled. She was sorely missed by Mrs. Wilton, to whom she had been of great assistance in her household occupations, besides taking the children off her hands. The vicar also regretted her absence, since she had been useful in the parish on Sundays. And as to May and Bob and Harold, they clamoured continually that she might be fetched back again, and were so pertinacious in their inquiries as to the reason for her going away, that their mother at last told them in desperation they

were little nuisances, and they should be whipped and sent to bed unless they held their tongues.

As the weeks rolled by the youngsters talked about her less frequently; but whenever they did recall her memory, it was in terms which showed how strong a hold she had obtained on their affection.

Virginia was now staying with Nurse Tenby at Carr House—the big stone building on the sea shore. Here the vicar sometimes saw his late governess, in the course of his rounds in the parish, and here he learned from the lips of 'Granny' that Miss Eagles was not returning to her home in the south at present. old lady said she hoped for her part that her darling would not return at all, under existing She thought she had better circumstances. remain where she was. To this Mr. Wilton made no reply. He did not feel competent to advise, not being in possession of all the facts of the case. Granny told him that she herself was leaving Slagthorpe in a month's time, and going to live at Duddenham, a seaport town some twelve miles up the coast, where she had already taken a house, and meant to get her

living by letting apartments. Her darling would go with her, of course.

'But why are you leaving Slagthorpe, Mrs. Tenby?'

She told him that Carr House was too big for her—the rent was too high—and the last two seasons had been poor ones.

- 'Mr. Rollick still lodges with you?'
- 'Yes, sir.'
- 'And the architect—he has not left you, I suppose?' said the vicar.

She told him no; that young gentleman was with her still; but he and Mr. Rollick were the only lodgers she had. As to her son, the ironworker, whose earnings had been her chief support, he had been thrown out of employment, like hundreds more, in consequence of the closing of the large rolling mills. Fortunately, however, he had obtained what promised to be a permanent situation at Duddenham, the seaport she had mentioned. That was why she had been looking out for a home there. Added to her own earnings in letting apartments, what her son would bring her would suffice for her support, and for Miss Eagles', too. Her darling, she said, would be comfort-

able and safe with her until she had got through her trouble, and instead of being a burden, would prove a help in many ways.

The vicar shook his head sadly, but did not give utterance to the doubts and fears that filled his mind. He subsequently had an interview with Virginia, but found her steadfast in her purpose not to return home to bring shame and trouble upon her father and her sister. With Mrs. Tenby, she said, she could earn her own living by assisting her in household work, and with Mrs. Tenby she would stay. Her sweet pale face, as she spoke those words, touched the old man's heart; and though he knew but a portion of her romantic history, he felt at that moment that he could not blame her. A short time afterwards he learned that she had gone, in company with her friends, to Duddenham, and that Carr House was shut up, the surgeon and the architect having obtained lodgings elsewhere.

'I am greatly distressed on her account,' the vicar said to himself. 'I do hope she may never come to want bread.' Little did he think his fears would be realised before many months had past.

Winter was succeeded by spring, and spring by summer, and he had heard no tidings of the late governess. The family at the vicarage, indeed, had almost ceased to think about her.

Now Mr. Wilton had arranged to hold a special service in the mission-room at Slagthorpe, while his curate (Mr. Peake) did duty at the parish church. The vicar put on his hat one sultry afternoon in July, telling his wife he was going to look up the ironworkers and their families on the outskirts of the parish, and endeavour to get them to attend the ser-He set out, and soon reached the dreary waste where the ex-M.P. had built (close to his now empty rolling-mills) several streets of wretched cottages, once occupied by his workpeople. Many of these tenements were now uninhabited. The windows were boarded up, and the scene was one of desolation and decay. Two or three small rolling-mills, however, were still at work, finding employment for such of the population as remained in the neighbourhood; and among these people Mr. Wilton pursued his pastoral labours most energetically. Several of his parishioners were furnacemen—for the reader is no doubt aware

that the first process in the manufacture of iron is that of reducing the ore (or *ironstone* as it is called) into a metallic state by means of fusion. This operation is conducted in a blast or smelting furnace—a round, tower-like structure of brick, having a small receptacle for the fuel beneath, a large interior space for the ore to be melted, a wide-mouthed chimney at the top, and air-holes at the bottom to admit either the hot or cold blast. Others of the men were puddlers, whose exhausting labour was performed at a reverbatory furnace, in which the metal was further purified.

After visiting several of the wives of these men in the cottages, Mr. Wilton stepped into the rolling-mills to speak to one or two of the operatives themselves, which he could do without interrupting their work. Their employer, indeed, had given him permission to pay this visit to-day. Usually he visited the craftsmen in their own homes, where he could converse with them more freely.

When he entered the mill, the vicar was at first nearly overcome by the intense heat which prevailed in the place, besides being deafened by the indescribable din caused by falling iron rails as they clattered on the ground; the whirr of machinery, the ringing of hammers, the shouting of the workmen, and other noises. Almost the first artisan he saw was the shingler, a tall, powerful fellow, cased from head to foot in leather and iron, and with a kind of mask over his face. He was toiling, like one possessed, at a steam hammer, which came pounding upon a mass of glowing metal, and sent myriads of sparks flying in all directions. He looked like a demon from the nether world.

After the balls of iron had been subjected to this pressure, which gave them homogeneity and fibre, they were passed through the rollers, which may be roughly described as consisting of two cylinders, worked in contact, and having on their surface a series of grooves varying in size. Through these grooves the iron is successively passed until reduced to the requisite width and thickness, water playing upon each pair of rollers to keep them cool. It is by this means converted into bars and rails. Mr. Wilton was standing by one of these machines watching

a pair of half-naked, smoke-begrimed, perspiring and excited youths who were employed at this process, when the foreman of the works approached him, and with a respectful salute, put a letter in his hand.

'Who is this from, Mr. Toone?' asked the vicar, for there was no superscription upon the envelope. He turned it over in his hand before opening it.

'Can-na say, Mr. Wilton,' replied the foreman, laconically.

'Are you sure it is intended for me? There is no address, I perceive.'

'A young woman ootside asked me to tak' and give it to ye this vara minit, but as to who the young woman might be I canna say. I never seen her afore, sir. Leastways, I think a body like to her used to be with your children, Mr. Wilton, but if it's the same body, she's strangely altered, and got thin and pinched like.'

The parish priest had opened the letter with trembling fingers, and a feeling of vague alarm, for it flashed upon him that he knew who the 'young woman' was. The contents were these:—

'I have passed through much suffering and been brought very low since you saw me last, and your former kindness emboldens me to ask for your advice, or at any rate to unburden my heart to you. May I see you to-morrow morning at your house? I will call there in the hope of doing so, at eleven o'clock.

'Poor girl!' thought the vicar, 'I wonder why she has come back to Slagthorpe! Something must have happened to old Mrs. Tenby, and she is left friendless and homeless in the world! But where can she be staying? There is no one in this neighbourhood that I know of that could take her in, or to whom she would be likely to apply. However, I will not fail to be at home to-morrow morning to receive her when she calls.'

Revolving these thoughts in his mind, Mr. Wilton, having spoken to a few of the operatives on the subject of the service, walked slowly out of the rolling-mills, and bent his steps towards his own house.

He remained within the vicarage through-

out the whole of the next morning, but to his great surprise the expected call was not paid. Nor did the late governess make her appearance at all that day, though he continued within doors, in the hope that she would do so. He was greatly perplexed and somewhat alarmed at the failure on her part to keep the appointment, fearing that she had been prevented by some unforeseen occurrence, or it might be by an accident. 'I wish I knew where she was staying,' he said to himself, 'I would then have gone to her.'

The following day was that fixed for the special service at the mission-room. The morning and afternoon glided away, and still Miss Eagles did not come, nor did he learn any tidings of her, though he had anxiously expected some message or explanation, to clear up the mystery of her non-appearance.

After tea he put on his hat and started for the service that was to be held on the outskirts of the parish, in the building that stood in the open fields. Even on this balmy summer's evening, the neighbourhood had a neglected, desolate look as he walked

over heaps of slag and refuse, and on illmade roads. Mr. Wilton did not mind these inconveniences now, but on a winter's night, as he knew to his cost, they were somewhat He had walked many a time to this mission-room in the dark, carrying a lantern (for there were no lamps anywhere about), stumbling over heaps of ashes, splashing through bogs and marshes, and occasionally floundering in a deep hole. Here and there, too, he had to keep a sharp look-out, or he would be run down by the locomotives, for connecting rails were laid between the blast-furnaces and the rolling-mills, and engines, dragging loaded trucks, darted to and fro incessantly (Sundays not excepted). Were it not that a flash of light from the furnaces at intervals illumined the obscurity. even the lantern would not have sufficed for his safe guidance during those winter nights.

The vicar trudged on, hoping to find a good congregation when he reached the mission-room. But those ironworkers were a drunken, dissolute lot. Their spare hours were given to the ale-house and rabbit coursing, and what with 'day shifts' and 'night

shifts,' and 'no clothes fit to come in,' they managed to elude Mr. Wilton's exhortations from year to year.

This evening he found only one man and three women in the room. The rest were ragged, dirty, shock-headed children. The vicar put on his surplice and began to read the prayers, while the youngsters got up a free fight amongst themselves. One ragamuffin, a lad with flaming red hair and an old jacket many sizes too large for him, took a clay pipe from his pocket, together with some tobacco and lucifer matches, and began to smoke, looking placidly at his companions who were pummelling one another energetically. When order had been restored the clergyman proceeded, and afterwards gave them a rousing sermon, during which they maintained a profound silence. The service ended, the parish priest turned off the gas, the young savages having dispersed with loud yells, some to stone the three women and the man, others to clamber on to the outer wall in order to ring the school bell in the yard, until they were dislodged by the vicar's walking-stick.

Mr. Wilton set out upon his walk homewards, musing upon the difficulties which modern progress had introduced into his pastoral work. He resolved, however, that he would not be disheartened, but would persevere until these heathens had learned, at length, the blessings of thrift, sobriety, and godliness.

Hearing a footstep behind him, he turned his head, and observed that he was followed by the man who had been in the mission-room that evening, and had afterwards been pelted by the boys. The stranger quickened his pace, and, overtaking the clergyman, asked if he might have a minute's conversation with him.

'Say on, my friend,' replied Mr. Wilton, 'I am entirely at your service.'





CHAPTER X.

THE WINTERHAM UNION.



ASK your pardon, sir,' said the man, a civil, honest-looking fellow of forty years or thereabouts,

habited as a respectable mechanic, and whose speech was entirely free from the northcountry accent,—' I ask your pardon for taking the liberty of speaking to you, but I'm the bearer of a message.'

- 'From whom, my friend?'
- 'From a young person, sir, who was to have called upon you a day or two since. I believe you had a note from her, sir?'

The vicar's interest was now fully awakened. He earnestly wished to gain some tidings of 'his late unfortunate governess, whose failure to keep her appointment had filled him with vague misgivings. He dreaded lest some evil

had befallen her. This man would doubtless be able to explain the mystery, and inform him where he might find her.

'I did,' he replied, 'and I greatly wondered why she did not come.'

'She was taken ill, sir, and was not able to go out,' said the man, who spoke with much feeling. 'I am very sorry, sir, that a young person like her should have to go through what she does. And her baby—'

Mr. Wilton started. The sadness of her situation came vividly to his mind, and he realised more painfully than ever he had done before how forlorn and destitute she was.

- 'The baby, of course, keeps her in a great deal. It's a poor delicate little thing, sir, and she doesn't like to leave it,' said the man.
 - 'She wishes to see me?'
- 'Very much indeed, sir, if you would not mind walking so far; but not to-night; the place is locked up now. Some time to-morrow, sir, if you would be so good.'
- 'But where is she staying, my friend? you have not told me that.'

The other hesitated, as though unwilling to give pain to the clergyman by revealing the

full extent of her poverty, and then replied, slowly,—

'In the workhouse.'

The vicar was unspeakably shocked, and tears came into his eyes as he thought of the squalid surroundings of this poor young girl, who had doubtless been brought up (judging from what Mrs. Tenby had told him, and from the air of refinement which no one could have omitted to perceive in the late governess) amid all the appliances of wealth and luxury.

'May I tell you, sir,' said the man, hastily wiping his honest eyes with the sleeve of his coat, 'how I came to be the bearer of this message? You see, sir, I am a bricklayer by trade, and I live just outside Winterham, not far from the workhouse, which stands, as you know, sir, about half-a-mile from the town. There is a religious service held in the union, sir, every Sunday morning, as you are aware, the ministers in the neighbourhood taking it in turns to preach a sermon to the paupers in the little chapel. Well, they had nobody to lead the singing for them; so as I had a turn for music, one of the poor law guardians asked me if I would mind

going to the workhouse on a Sunday morning, taking my fiddle with me, and acting as conductor, like. Of course, I said yes, with pleasure. I daresay you may have seen me, sir, at such times as you have taken duty there?'

'I have, my friend,' said Mr. Wilton heartily.

'You knew me again, did you, sir? Well, this morning I went to the union according to my custom, with my fiddle under my arm, and I led the singing for them, and sat on a wooden bench among the paupers to listen to the minister's sermon. I noticed a young woman among the congregation whom I had never seen there before. Her face was handsome, and she had the manner of a lady, though her clothes were mean. She was very pale and downcast—it touched my heart to see her look so sorrowful. I said to myself that young woman's history is a remarkable one. I'll be bound! When the minister's sermon was over, and the paupers were leaving the room—passing by me on their way to the door-she looked at me very hard, and-be whipped if she didn't put a note in my hand, and vanish in an instant! I had noticed that

she was writing with a pencil during the service, but supposed she was taking notes of the minister's discourse! Well, when I got outside, sir, I unfolded the note and read it. It told me that the vicar of Slagthorpe had been very kind to her while she remained in his parish; that she had written to tell him of her return to this neighbourhood, and appointing a time to see him at the vicarage; that she had been prevented from keeping her engagement; and that she very much wished for an interview. Would I do a forlorn stranger a great service by seeing the clergyman, and asking him to visit her? Well, sir, not being able to do so earlier, I came to your house late this afternoon, and I found you had already started to walk to the special service in the mission-room. I followed: but those outrageous young savages over there would give me no chance of speaking to you until now.'

The honest bricklayer here ended his recital, and as they had by this time reached Mr. Wilton's house they parted company, the clergyman having thanked him for the trouble he had taken, and promised to walk over to the union on the following day.

The Winterham workhouse—a gloomy, redbricked structure, was situated on a rising ground, not far from the high road; and it overlooked the country for many miles. The women's infirmary was in the east wing of the building. Here the parish priest found Virginia on the afternoon of the next day, walking between the rows of little beds, with her infant in her arms. There was no other occupant of the infirmary, with the exception of an old woman, who was paralysed and lay in a bed at the end of the room.

'It is kind in you to come and see me,' said Virginia, the colour mounting to her cheeks as Mr. Wilton approached her. Then she turned her face away to hide her tears. He took her hand, murmuring a few words of sympathy, and they sat down. Presently she laid the baby, which was sleeping, in her bed, after which she unfolded to the clergyman the circumstances which had necessitated her departure from Duddenham. The narrative was a brief but very painful one. It appeared that our heroine, accompanied by Nurse Tenby and her son, had not left Slagthorpe three months before her child was born. Granny

nursed her tenderly, and in due time she recovered her usual strength. The infant, however, was weak and sickly from its birth, and needed the mother's constant attention. Scarcely had Virginia come downstairs again after her confinement, when her old and faithful friend was seized with a sudden illness.

'It was now my opportunity, Mr. Wilton,' said she, 'to endeavour to repay her unselfish and noble conduct to myself by waiting upon her night and day. I did so, but to my unspeakable grief she grew rapidly worse. course medical advice had been obtained, but every effort made to save her life was in vain. She breathed her last in my arms, and I was left desolate and heart-broken. The only tie which bound me to the neighbourhood being removed, and to-to escape,' she continued, her pale countenance suffused with crimson,— 'to escape from the attentions of her son. I left Duddenham to seek advice from you. I arrived in this town penniless, but lacked the courage to knock at your door, though I lingered within sight of your house until nightfall. I was then compelled, not having the means to obtain a lodging elsewhere, to take refuge in this place.'

Here there was a pause, which was at length broken by the clergyman.

- 'May I ask if you have written home to acquaint your friends with your present circumstances?'
- 'I have written to them,' she answered with a fresh burst of tears, 'but not since Nurse Tenby died. The first letter was kindly taken for me by Mr. Rollick. Two other letters were conveyed by a friend of his, who often takes journeys into the south. There were reasons why I wished to remain apart from my relations,' she added, 'and by their means my whereabouts was kept secret, for they posted the letters close to my father's house.'
- 'May I ask if the reasons you allude to are still sufficiently cogent to prevent your return home? Are you still resolved to remain hidden from them?'

She buried her face in her hands and murmured 'Yes.'

'I need not ask you,' continued Mr. Wilton solemnly, 'if you have weighed the matter with the utmost care, seeking guidance from above,

that your decision might be the best for all parties? I am sure you have done so. And I am satisfied that you have taken thought for others rather than yourself.'

She remained with her head bent down, while her frame was shaken with the intensity of her emotion.

The vicar spoke words of comfort to her in the exercise of his holy office, offering such counsel as he deemed most fitting under the circumstances. When she at length became calmer, he took his leave, convinced that her lips had been sealed by an overmastering conviction that the safety of the man who had wronged her depended upon her silence.

He returned to the union the next day, to find that the infant was seriously ill, while the mother was bending over it with yearning fear and anguish. A doctor was present, who afterwards told Mr. Wilton that the child could not possibly recover.

The vicar brought his wife, when he came the next time, and she did all a woman could do in such a case to show her sympathy and to administer consolation and assistance. The baby lingered about a week, and then its feeble spark of life was quenched.

It was buried in the cemetery at Winterham, in the very grave where Virginia's mother had been laid to rest nearly twenty years before. The service was read by Mr. Wilton, who himself paid the expenses of the funeral.





CHAPTER XI.

HAROLD'S ILLNESS.

change was manifest in Virginia. She seemed to be broken in mind and heart. When the vicar came to see her at the union he did not fail to observe how listless and absent-minded she had become, and he even feared she would droop and pine away until she followed her mother and her baby to the cemetery at Winterham. Once he found her lying upon the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

'She takes no interest in anything, sir,' said the matron of the workhouse, with whom he was conversing about her state one afternoon. 'She has become strangely forgetful, and walks like one in a dream.'

The good clergyman spoke to his wife

upon the subject. What could they do, to rouse her out of this nerveless, spiritless condition?

- 'We must find her a situation, Ambrose,' said Mrs. Wilton.
 - 'Yes, Martha.'
- 'If she had some regular employment,' continued the vicar's wife, 'some occupation that would draw away her thoughts from her sorrows, she would after a time gain strength and cheerfulness. Is she quite resolved not to return to her friends?'
 - 'Quite, Martha.'
- 'Well, Ambrose, we have never been suited with a governess, you know, since she left us. The young person who succeeded her remained only six months, and our children are running wild again. You might ask her if she would like to resume her duties here—'
 - 'A capital thought, Martha!'
- 'By doing so,' continued Mrs. Wilton, 'she would once more be introduced to respectable society, and regain after a time her former position in life; for people would soon cease talking about her when they found how well-

conducted she was, and that we had a good opinion of her.'

'We won't mind people's tongues, Martha,' said the clergyman.

'Not in such a case as this, Ambrose. And besides, the children would love to have her back. She managed them and looked after them so well. They have lately been too much in the care of Jane, the housemaid, who is not to be trusted. The other day Jane took them out for a walk, and actually allowed Harold to accompany her into some poor person's house where there was an infectious disease! The child might have caught it, for all we know to the contrary! If Miss Eagles will resume her duties here I shall be glad to receive her, and to make her as comfortable and happy as I can.'

Accordingly, Mr. Wilton took an early opportunity of visiting the union once more. He then with much delicacy and kindness gave our heroine the offer of the situation, telling her what his wife had said respecting her willingness to befriend her in every possible way. The offer was accepted, and

in a few days Virginia was duly reinstated as governess at the vicarage. On her arrival there, however, she found her friends in a state of distress and anxiety about little Harold, who had been seized with a sudden and alarming illness. A few hours previously he had accompanied Jane, the housemaid, to Winterham to do some errands. They were gone much longer than was expected. When they came back the child's limbs were so rigid that he had to be assisted into the house. He complained of langour and weariness. Laying him on the sofa, his mother touched his brow with her hand and found it burning. They carried him up to bed, while the housemaid was despatched for the doctor.

Virginia entered the vicarage at this crisis, little dreaming how brief her stay therein was destined to prove, or that Harold's illness was to be not only the first but also the last event connected with that stay. She did not foresee the strange series of incidents about to take place that were to alter the whole current of her life.

Mr. Rollick came into the house, going at

once up stairs to see the little patient. In twenty minutes' time he came down again with the anxious mother, and they went into the sitting-room. The surgeon looked grave. He now spoke in a serious, measured tone, quite unlike his usual random utterance.

- 'It is a case of scarlet fever.'
- 'Oh! Mr. Rollick!—'
- 'Do not be alarmed, my dear madam. With careful nursing I hope and believe he will get through it nicely. The direct cause of a disease of this kind is often difficult to trace. The infection may have been taken into the system some time since, and lain dormant until now. Your drains are in good order, I suppose?'

'Yes, Mr. Rollick. Ah me! I now remember! It was Jane, the housemaid.'

The vicar's wife then related how her servant had disobeyed her orders by taking the child into some poor person's house at the time that scarlet fever was raging in it. 'She shall be dismissed at once,' said Mrs. Wilton.

The surgeon told her that had probably been the cause of the boy's illness, for fever was derived from an animal origin, formed by exhalations given off from the living bodies of those who were affected with it.

- 'Harold complained of weariness and cold, Mr. Rollick, as the girl was leading him home to-day.'
- 'Exactly, my dear madam. There is a preliminary stage of langour, weakness, defective appetite, and some degree of chilliness or shivering, which arise from the derangement of the great nervous centres, in which sensation, intellectual operation, and voluntary motion have their seat, namely, the brain and spinal cord. In an attack of fever, my dear sir,' continued Mr. Rollick, turning to the clergyman, 'the disordered condition of the brain is indicated by a loss of mental energy, and closely connected with this mental weakness is the loss of energy in the muscles of voluntary motion. Lassitude is the result. The movements of the body are feeble and unsteady as the energy of the mind is impaired.'
- 'Then you are quite sure my boy is suffering from an attack of scarlet fever, Mr. Rollick?' asked the vicar.
- 'I have not the least doubt upon the subject, my dear sir; a remarkable change is visible in

the little fellow's countenance. Its expression is that of dejection, and is strikingly similar to that of a very weak person suffering from fatigue. The colour of the face is pallid, and the features are somewhat shrunk; but its general aspect is so peculiar and characteristic that an experienced eye can distinguish the disease even at this early period, and without asking a single question.'

The mother sighed and stood listening, while her fingers twitched nervously.

'His skin, too,' continued the surgeon, 'partakes in a remarkable degree of the debility which has shown itself in the muscles of locomotion. You observed, my dear madam, when your little son was lying on the sofa, before he was carried up to bed, that the ordinary temperature of this room produced in him a sensation of cold which was almost intolerable?'

'Yes, Mr. Rollick, the poor child shivered violently though he was covered with my shawl.'

'Exactly. And even in his warm bed upstairs he experiences a sensation of chilliness, and would do if the room were heated. This

has been considered one of the most constant signs of fever. But while my little patient feels this sensation of cold, there is no diminution in the quantity of caloric in his system. I applied the thermometer, as you saw, to his body, and it rose as high as when he was in a state of health. And when you touched his skin with your hand, Mrs. Wilton, it communicated, not the feeling of cold, but, on the contrary, that of preternatural heat.'

'Ah! my unfortunate boy! Yes, Mr. Rollick, it did.'

'The pulse, also, was no longer perfectly natural. It was more languid than in a state of health. Sometimes it was a little quicker, at other times it was slower, now and then it was scarcely changed in frequency, but its action was invariably weaker than in its sound state.'

'He seems greatly troubled in his breathing, Mr. Rollick,' said the vicar's wife, with another sigh.

'He does; and that is another symptom. His respiration is shorter and quicker than is natural. The chest does not expand freely, and nature seeks compensation in an additional number of respirations. Some of my fever

patients do not show at first much alteration either in the pulse or the breathing, so long as they remain perfectly still. But if they were to rise and attempt to walk across the room, their pulse would instantly become rapid, and their respiration be quickened almost to fainting. And now, my dear madam, I perceive that you are burning to ask me some question. What is it? I will answer you to the best of my ability.'

'The treatment, Mr. Rollick--'

'I was coming to that very point. But pray do not labour under any mistake. There is no cutting short the progress of a fever by medicines, Mrs. Wilton! Oh dear, no! It must be allowed to take its own time,—subject to our watchful supervision, of course.'

'Ah! must it indeed!'

'You understand me? I will write out a prescription for the medicine appropriate to this case, if you will favour me with pen and ink—thank you! Now, my dear madam, taking it for granted that my patient's disease progresses favourably, little else need be done than to attend to his dietetic wants.'

^{&#}x27;Yes.'

'Should he be in a sinking and exhausted state, ammonia wine and brandy will be found powerful agents for good. You will take care, too, that the room of the sick child be always well ventilated, for there should be a constant and free access of pure air. Regarding some other necessary precautions I spoke to you upstairs, I believe?'

'You did, doctor. I will carry out your directions most faithfully,' said Mrs. Wilton.

'To those remarks I will now add,' continued Mr. Rollick, taking up his hat and gloves, 'that the use of chlorine or some other disinfectant is indispensable.'

'And the other children, doctor?' said the anxious mother, following him to the door. 'What about Robert and May? Will it be safe for them to remain in the house?' Mrs. Wilton stood before the oracle, her noble features (of which the great charm lay, as we have before stated, rather in their wondrous mobility than in their regularity of form) working with intense feeling.

'As I said before, my dear madam,—when we stood at the bedside of my little patient,—

he should be separated as much as possible from the other children—'

- 'Yes.'
- 'The poor little fellow must be isolated in that bedroom. If you think they can be kept quite apart from him, and from those who nurse him, without your having to send them away—'
- 'But I would not like them to run the least risk.'
- 'Then I recommend,' said the surgeon, 'that they be removed from the house at your earliest convenience. As I before remarked, Mrs. Wilton, with such careful nursing as you will give my little patient, I hope and believe that he will get through his illness nicely. Good afternoon. Good afternoon, my dear sir.'

When Mr. Rollick was gone the vicar said,

'I think, Martha, that my sister Cordelia would receive the children in this emergency with the utmost willingness, since it is necessary they should be sent away.'

Now Cordelia was the wife of the incumbent of Winterham.

'That very thought was in my own mind,

Ambrose,' replied Mrs. Wilton. 'Of course she would. Do you go and make the arrangement with her, taking Bob and May with you, while I run to the little sufferer upstairs.'

So saying, Mrs. Wilton betook herself to the sick chamber, and her husband put on his hat to go to the vicarage at Winterham.





CHAPTER XII.

SHADOWS.

HEN she heard her husband close the house door after him, Mrs. Wilton went to the bedroom window and looked out. Her eyes filled with tears as she saw him leading Bob and May by the hand, and walking with them along the winding street in the direction of Winterham Vicarage. She had not dared to bid them good-bye, or even to see them, when she knew what Harold's illness was. It was the last sight she would have of the dear ones for many, many weeks. She would be a voluntary prisoner in this sick room, for she meant to nurse the sufferer night and day, never leaving him for a moment. The children must not return to her until long after their brother should be quite restored to health, if it pleased God to bring him safely through this fever.

She brushed her tears away, and quickly bestirred herself in attending to the wants of the little patient. The room was denuded of its furniture, the carpet taken up, and disinfectants liberally applied in all directions. While she was busy in ministering to Harold's needs, Mr. Wilton returned home.

'Well, my dear, Cordelia has taken them in, and says she will be a mother to them. It grieved her to hear the sad news, of course. She said everything that was good and kind, and we know the children are in good hands there.'

'Oh yes, Ambrose; and I am so thankful! But still, I am very sorry that she should be put about.'

'Cordelia has a willing heart, my dear; and beside, she has plenty of servants in the house. You know, my sister's husband is much better off in regard to worldly possessions than we are.'

'Then you did not mention Miss Eagles' name to her?'

^{&#}x27;No, Martha.'

- 'I thought your sister might wish to have Miss Eagles in the house with the children, as she manages and understands them so well, and by that means Bob and May would be kept in order, and Cordelia would have less trouble with them.'
- 'But, Martha,' said the vicar, 'recent events in connection with Miss Eagles might make Cordelia hesitate about having her residing in her house in the capacity of a governess, although to you and me those events have caused hardly any difference at all. My sister does not know Miss Eagles so well as we do. She has only heard of her misfortunes, and therefore looks at her history from a different point of view. And again, Cordelia has plenty of people about her who can look after our children. Miss Eagles will be of great service to you at home, my dear.'
 - 'Do you mean in nursing Harold?'
- 'Yes; and in other ways as well,' replied Mr. Wilton.
- 'I intend to remain with him constantly myself, night and day, Ambrose.'
- 'But, my dear, you must have rest. We shall all have to take our turns,' said the

parish priest, in a decided tone, as though he did not wish the matter to be discussed any farther.

'Then, if Miss Eagles remains here, where there is infection, she must not go to see the children at all,' replied his wife.

'So be it.'

As time passed on it became evident that Harold had taken the disease in its severer form. His sleep from the first had been disturbed and unrefreshing; when two or three days had elapsed he scarcely slept at all, the febrile uneasiness not admitting of repose either night or day. The poor little fellow could not remain in any position long, and was incessantly shifting his place in the bed, though he could never elude his pain. The pulse, which had been feebler than was natural when the attack seized him, was now much quicker. fuller, and stronger than in a sound state, and continually increased in frequency. His skin grew hotter, his mouth was dry and parched, and the tongue began to be covered with fur.

Mr. Rollick came twice and sometimes three times a day, watching the progress of the disease, superintending and directing the mother's sleepless exertions.

'My dear Mrs. Wilton,' he whispered, as they stood over the bed one afternoon, 'your nursing is admirable, and my little patient is doing as well as can be expected. I perceive that those patches of scarlet-coloured efflorescence which first appeared on his face and neck have coalesced and spread everywhere. Brave little man! We shall pull him through yet, I trust and believe. His throat, I see, is severely affected, and there is delirium, but all those things are looked for in a malady of this kind. A little more patience, my dear madam!'

'When did you say the fever may be expected to subside, doctor?' asked the anxious mother.

'On the twelfth day,' replied the surgeon.
'The eruption is now at its height. You observe that the scarlet hue of those irregular patches is very vivid indeed. Even the mouth is not free from it. The tongue is unusually red, and the face is swollen.'

Thus Harold lay in great danger, tossing upon the bed, raving and moaning throughout

the day and night. His mother would not leave him nor even undress herself until the crisis was past, and the violence of the symptoms began to abate. Virginia had begged from the first that she might be allowed to share her watchings. Now at length Mrs. Wilton permitted herself some repose, and Virginia took her place at the bedside, moistening the patient's lips, and doing her best to soothe and relieve his pain. Harold recognised the governess, and by the glance of his eye and the pressure of his tiny hand, gave tokens of his satisfaction at her re-appearance.

Our heroine was endeavouring to keep her own sorrows within bounds, and she devoted herself earnestly to the work of alleviating, as far as possible, the sufferings of her young friend and pupil. She made herself so useful, indeed, both in the sick-room and in the household, that both the vicar and his wife declared they did not know what they should have done without her. Her help was certainly invaluable during this protracted period of trial and affliction.

Virginia believed that her own inward malady—that of the mind and heart, was fast approach-

ing a crisis, nor could she foresee any earthly cure. But though to her the future seemed blank and hopeless, yet it was mercifully ordained by Heaven that after one more sharp stroke, the heaviest of all, that malady should pass away, even as Harold's fever was now abating. May she be strengthened to bear the final blow which is now so soon to fall!

Mrs. Wilton was concerned to notice that the governess' health, appetite, and spirits were still at a low ebb, and indeed were diminishing daily.

Virginia had not only the burden of her recent troubles to bear; she was also in a painful state of incertitude as to the future. The home yearning was exceedingly strong; and she was devoured by anxiety respecting Felicia and her father. It was now so long since she had seen them. She knew they were in distress because she did not return. Might it not be possible to make some terms with her father? If only they would allow her to keep silence about Charles--! Would it be possible to live with them again, and see no reproachful glances, hear no importunate questions? She remembered that she had given her father no chance of coming to

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terms with her. Ought she not to ask advice from her natural guardian and protector as to what his own wishes were? Supposing her father desired her to live apart from them, she could then do so with a good conscience. And Felicia, who was so wise and clever-might not she have some counsel to offer - some middle course to suggest? On one point, however, Virginia remained firm and immovable-she would never breathe a syllable of Charles' confession into any mortal ear! At any rate, he should be shielded from harm, come what might to herself! Ah! if she only knew whether it would be wisest, safest, and best that she should reveal the place of her abode to those she loved so dearly, or to continue hidden to the end.

And Charles?—he must not find her, because she was not his wife. She would always love him, but they must never meet again! But would he not soon find her if her retreat should become known in Davenstone? Her dead child, too, lying in the Winterham cemetery, was it not a tie to bind her here? She could not bear the thought of leaving its grave among strangers in the far north. Little

Harold too! At any rate she would put off the writing home, or any thought of return, until this poor sufferer was restored to health. Thus her melancholy thoughts took shape after shape, as she sat watching by the sick bed.

There were times when Virginia feared that she would lose her reason, for at intervals her powers of reflection and judgment were seriously impaired, her ideas were confused, and she was subject to strange hallucinations. While she was nursing the little fever patient, the conviction would force itself into her mind that it was her own sick child she was tending, and that it was Harold who lay in that tiny grave at Winterham. She strove to thrust the wild fancy away, battling with the dreadful delusions that would intrude upon her, and earnestly praying to Heaven that she might not be deprived of her sanity.

Seasons of deep depression would be followed by unwonted excitement, and at night when she lay in her bedroom,—the vicar's wife having relieved her from her attendance upon the patient for a few hours—she found it impossible to get repose or sink into forgetfulness.

Occasionally she would fall into a troubled

sleep, when she would dream that it was her child that was ill in the next roomthat it cried mamma! mamma!—that she could not move to its relief, for her head was crushed with heavy weights, and her limbs bound with clanking chains; while the father of her babe, yes! Charles himself! came striding over moor and fen, over crag and torrent in search of her,-but thick darkness came on and he lost his way! Then she lifted her voice in a loud despairing scream, and awoke.

The next night she again fell into a dose, and those wailing cries pierced her ears once more. She struggled, but could not stir. Then she saw the vicar carry his own child to the little grave in Winterham cemetery and bury it.

When the morning broke she fell upon her knees, and begged God of His infinite mercy to keep her from evil, and to guide her footsteps in the right path. Her life was broken, her heart was crushed. Oh! that heavenly wisdom and goodness might interpose to bring order out of confusion, and light out of darkness!

Yes, Virginia! sorely tried and humbled! That prayer is heard; and though the valley of the shadow of death is before thee, thoushalt yet know, even on earth, that He is better than all thy fears!

She dressed herself and went down stairs, where she assisted the only servant in the house (since Jane the housemaid had been dismissed for that act of disobedience and reckless folly which so nearly cost Harold his life), to prepare the morning meal. Presently Mrs. Wilton descended from the sick room, and after the customary greeting said,

'Miss Eagles, how good you are; but you really should take more rest. You look pale and ill.'

Then, after a pause, and a murmured reply from the governess, she added,—

'I have written about some underclothing and a change of dress for Bob and May. Would you kindly take it after breakfast to Mrs. Newton?'

Mrs. Newton was the vicar's sister, at whose house the children were staying.

'Give my love and best thanks to her, and bring me word how they are — the

darlings! Get a little peep at them if you can, but oh! do not go near them, because you have been nursing Harold, you know; and do not let them see you, for pity's sake, or they will clamour to come back, and will run to cling about your neck'





CHAPTER XIII.

VIRGINIA REBUKED.

HIS was not the first occasion on which the handsome governess had been sent to Winterham vicarage during the time that Bob and May had been staying there. On the contrary, either our heroine or Mr. Wilton had gone every day, charged with some message, and also to make inquiries respecting the children. But the latter had been in ignorance of the visits, the greatest care having been taken to keep them out of the way, lest infection should be carried to them by their father or Miss Eagles. Mysterious signals were exchanged before the house was entered; the little folks were then quickly despatched into the back garden, and moist eyes watched their gambols from behind the window curtains. The reader will understand how eagerly the tidings which the messengers afterwards conveyed home were received by Mrs. Wilton, voluntarily imprisoned as she was in the sick room at Slagthorpe.

After breakfast on the memorable morning now in question, Virginia, having the letter that had been entrusted to her in her hands. started for Mrs. Newton's house. On the way her thoughts reverted once more to her own forlorn and sorrowful situation. wondered if her perplexities and trials would ever be ended. Would she ever see her father and sister again? Oh! if she might but unburden her heart to them! She would tell her father everything, if only he would promise beforehand not to visit his displeasure upon Charles. In fancy she fondly revisited several old familiar scenes in Davenstone, and recalled to her recollection the acquaintances and friends she had known there-Mr. Shearwater and the grave community at Thacker's Yard; the landlord of the Lady Enid Hotel, his pretty wife and family; Valentine Laxey, Alderman Jeffard, and many others. Her mind dwelt most, however, upon the time when she first

saw the stranger in the claret-coloured velvet suit, who had come so suddenly and unexpectedly upon them at the tea party in Thacker's Yard. That was the turning point in her life. She had given her heart to that stranger; but oh, what marvellous surprises had she known since then! Would the time ever come when she might reveal all she knew? Would she ever see Charles again?

She was musing thus, in a melancholy and abstracted manner, too much occupied with her own reflections to take note of objects or persons in the streets as she walked mechanically along, when she found herself already opposite the vicarage where the children were staying. She stopped, and glanced up hurriedly at the windows, hoping that Bob and May had not seen her pass. Apparently they had not: but Mrs. Newton was at that moment looking out of the drawing-room window, and to her she gave the preconcerted signal, importing that she was the bearer of a message from Mrs. Wilton. She then crossed the street for the purpose of entering the house, and had just paused at the door, when she heard her own name called out in an accent

of astonishment and delight by some one whose voice sounded strangely familiar in her ears.

She turned and beheld Valentine Laxey! Virginia caught hold of the iron railing in front of the vicarage, in order to keep herself from falling, for she was overcome by a death-like faintness, while the Councillor hurried up along the footway, and took her cold, nerveless hands in his strong grasp.

'Miss Eagles!' he exclaimed, in an impassioned tone, 'I entreat you, for Heaven's sake, to look upon me, and to give me a welcome. Thank God, I have found you at last!'

By a strong effort she mastered her emotion which his unexpected appearance had occasioned, and replied with a faint smile,—

'I am so glad to see you! But the shock was so great, I scarcely—Oh! tell me, are they—Felicia and my father—are they both well?'

At this juncture the door was opened by the maid-servant.

- 'I will wait for you,' said Laxey.
- 'Oh, do!'

In a hurried, agitated manner Virginia handed

the letter to the girl, who had overheard the last few words, and followed the retreating figure of the Councillor with her eyes, as though she was suspicious that all was not right. Scarcely knowing what she said in the tumult and confusion of her feelings, the governess asked a few questions respecting the children, which the servant answered in a curt and contemptuous tone, and then closed the door in her face. For a moment Virginia's face crimsoned with anger and indignation at this gross insult; but when she bethought herself, that the girl had probably been told of her misfortunes, she turned away with a sigh, and her cheeks were suffused with unbidden tears.

She rejoined Laxey, and they walked along the street together.

'Your father and sister are well—that is, as well as can be expected — you see what I mean?' the Councillor began, in answer to her repeated interrogatories. 'But what do I say? This sudden meeting has quite disconcerted me,' he went on, with much seriousness. 'Felicia has been ill—dreadfully ill; and that delayed their search for you.'

- 'Oh! that I had known! Has she recovered?'
- 'Partially. But, my dear Miss Eagles, where in the name of all that is mysterious have you been living during the last twelve months?'
- 'At Slagthorpe vicarage most of the time. But do give me news of home!'
- 'Well, I will tell you what has happened since you left. Almost as soon as your disappearance was known, your luggage came from the station. That set the servants thinking. By degrees it began to be whispered about the town that you had been to your father's for one night, but had departed again for some undiscovered reason. Before then, however, I had left Davenstone to run down here for a few days on business—'
- 'Here!' exclaimed Virginia; 'and I was living with poor Nurse Tenby at that very time; and we actually came into Winterham once! We might have met!'
- 'I wish we had! Well, on my return to Davenstone, I heard a few vague rumours respecting you, and afterwards got the facts from your father and sister. They had found the man who carried your box that morning to

the railway station, and had also ascertained that you went up to London. They followed you, of course, without delay; but you had not been either to your uncle's or to your Aunt Barbara's. Inquiries were also made at Dr. Tuckett's, Mr. Thwaites', and Mr. Chutney's. Your father then went to Codrington Square, Chelsea; but there was no trace of you at any of these places, nor could any information as to your whereabouts be obtained. Strangely enough, Mr. Dangerfield had disappeared also! His friends told your father he had left the neighbourhood; but whither he had gone they could not say! Advertisements were put in the Times and several other daily papers, and the search was continued vigorously, but with no result. Then came your letters! The clue they furnished, however, was a misleading one, for there was only one post office stamp upon the envelope, and that simply bore the word "Davenstone." Could it be that you were really in the town! we thought. Felicia, who had fallen ill with anxiety and grief, now revived, but still the efforts made to find you were in vain. Now comes the extraordinary part of my story. It transpired that Mr.

Dangerfield had employed my friend Melody, the innkeeper, to seek for you—'

'Mr. Dangerfield! You mean-'

Virginia checked herself suddenly, and turned away her face to hide its crimson, while her companion concluded his narrative as follows,—

'Melody, you know, has always been a close, cautious man. He never would tell me how it came about that Mr. Dangerfield should employ him in this business. But such is the fact, and I am persuaded that my wary friend is in possession of some secret which he will divulge to no one. However, I came down to Winterham last night in search of you, and by a most happy chance, caught sight of your face as I was walking along the street just now. Tell me how you have fared during all this time.'

Virginia then related to him the incidents with which the reader is acquainted, dwelling most, however, upon Mr. Wilton's kindness to her, and touching upon the subject of her own sorrows very lightly indeed. Yet quite enough was revealed to fill Valentine Laxey's warm heart with the deepest compassion, and a de-

sire to visit some dire chastisement upon Mr. The Councillor, as we have Dangerfield. before intimated, was not a discreet man. He was excitable, passionate, easily moved to anger, and when roused, would pour out a torrent of invective and denunciation. did so in this instance, although he had been told that Virginia had fled from her father's house on account of some hard words the latter had spoken against the artist. had a prudent man like Mr. Melody happened to encounter our heroine instead of the hasty, hot-headed Councillor, it is probable that the former might have induced Virginia to return home with him. Laxey's vehement words only confirmed her in the purpose of remaining apart from Charles' enemies.

'Your father was right,' the Councillor said, as he concluded his tirade. 'The man is a scoundrel, and we must bring him to a reckoning. Come back to Davenstone with me, my dear, and your wrongs shall be avenged.'

'Never!' she answered.

He reasoned with her, using all the arguments he could think of to induce her to comply; but while she thanked him for the

kind interest he had taken, she continued firm, being fully persuaded that if she went home, she would have to yield up her secret, and thus expose the man she loved to the effects of her father's resentment.

'I long to see them,' she said, weeping bitterly. 'Perhaps some day we may meet again. Give my fond, fond love to them. Of course I shall write; but it is better—far better that we should not live under the same roof.'

He accompanied her as far as the door of Slagthorpe vicarage, still urging her to go back; and then finding her immovable, he fervently pressed the hand she held out to him, noted once more the pathetic, despairing expression of her beautiful face, and—walked slowly and reluctantly away, saying, 'I shall remain here a day or two. Perhaps you may change your mind. Meanwhile, I may write to your father, may I not?'

'Yes, Valentine. Good-bye!'

She entered the house, and retired hastily, but with trembling limbs, to her bedroom, where, overpowered by the violence of her emotion, she sank down upon the floor, and soon lost all consciousness.

Now the servant at Winterham vicarage, who in an access of virtuous indignation and scorn had closed the door in Virginia's face, had straightway communicated her suspicions to her mistress. Mrs. Newton, thinking that her brother ought to be informed regarding the advent of this stranger, whose appearance had so agitated the governess, had lost no time in walking over to Slagthorpe vicarage, to give the clergyman advice and caution upon the subject.

Consequently, when our heroine, having recovered from her swoon, betook herself downstairs, she was received with cold looks and in reproachful silence. She supposed this was on account of the great length of time she had been absent upon her errand to Mrs. Newton, and therefore murmured a broken apology and explanation, which, however, was not considered satisfactory.

Nothing was said respecting the stranger until bedtime that night. Virginia had taken her candle, and was on the point of retiring to her room, when Mr. Wilton in a grave tone asked her to step into the study with him.

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'Miss Eagles,' said he, when he had closed the door, and she had seated herself at his request, 'I regret to have to speak to you upon a very painful subject. I have reason to believe that the man who brought you into trouble, and from whom you have been hiding, has at length found you, and that he has been tempting you to live with him in sin, or at any rate to renew your intimacy. Promise me that you will not see him again, or have any communication with him. While you have been under my roof you have been well-conducted hitherto, and we have believed you virtuous. It is true you have always been reticent in regard to your antecedents and the names of your acquaintances, keeping from us matters which, I think, we had a right to know. We waived that right, however, and put the fullest trust in your uprightness and purity. We have taken you into our household a second time, notwithstanding all that has happened. Let me beg of you to avoid that man! I am told you were overheard exchanging promises to continue a correspondence. day you have concealed the fact of this encounter from Mrs. Wilton and myself. I have only to add, that if you see the man again, or write to him, you will forfeit my good opinion and that of Mrs. Wilton.'

With streaming eyes Virginia protested that the man was not the father of her child, that he was nothing more than a dear friend, and that she was entirely innocent of any such intention as was hinted at. The grey-headed vicar heard her indeed, but—the passionate declarations did not carry conviction to his mind.

'Take heed,' he said solemnly, as he rose and opened the door for her to pass to her bedroom, 'and avoid the very appearance of evil. The path to heaven is toilsome. May God preserve you and strengthen you! Goodnight!'





CHAPTER XIV.

A NIGHT WATCH.

HE household had now retired—a dead silence reigned all around. Mr. Wilton, having looked to the fastenings of the doors and windows, took his candle, and walked upstairs to his bedroom. In the corridor he had to pass the entrance to the chamber in which Harold lay, slowly recovering from his fever. The vicar looked in for a moment to say 'Good night' to his wife, who was watching by the sick - bed, fully dressed as usual. Then he stepped softly to his own room, and closing the door, began to prepare for bed. Virginia's chamber was opposite that occupied by the little sufferer. The vicar had noticed that her light was still burning, but had felt no uneasiness on that account, believing that it would be extinguished very soon.

He had remarked the worn, pained, weary expression upon the face and bearing of the governess at the time she retired from his study; but still he did not think he had spoken to her with needless severity. He was not aware, however, how much the tenderly nurtured girl had endured that day, or he might have dreaded the effect his words would have upon her overwrought frame, and especially upon her intellect, sorely tried as it had been by the sorrows of the past twelve months.

Of late he had frequently lain awake for a considerable time, listening to the movements of his wife in the sick-room, to the moanings of the sufferer, and to the low soothing tones of the mother's voice, as she sought to hush the little patient to rest. He lay listening thus to-night, and presently his ear caught other and unaccustomed sounds, which gradually filled his mind with alarm. There were hurried footsteps, passionate pleadings, half-smothered cries—and they all proceeded from Miss Eagles' chamber.

He rose, silently opened the door, and paid still more eager attention. The church clock boomed the hour of midnight. When the measured strokes had ceased, he saw in the ghostly obscurity his wife pass with swift, silent footfall out of his son's room into the governess's. Then the passionate pleadings, the half-smothered cries, were repeated. What could it mean? He began to dress himself nervously, feeling a presentiment of coming trouble.

'Make haste, Ambrose,' said his wife, in awestruck tones. 'A terrible change has taken place in Miss Eagles. I fear she has lost her reason!'

Mrs. Wilton had entered his chamber noiselessly, her face wearing an affrighted look.

'I was coming, Martha.'

'Oh, Ambrose! what shall we do with her? I cannot manage her. She will not mind me in the least. You know it is more than two hours since she came up to bed. I waited for her light to be put out, but there it was, burning still, and I heard murmurs and sobs. So I stole into her room to ascertain the reason, and to see if I could comfort her. She was still

dressed, but was kneeling, with her face buried in her hands. I spoke to her, and then she clung to my knees, begging for forgiveness. I spoke kindly to her, and prayed her to be calm, and to undress herself and get into bed. On her promising to do so I left her; but, Ambrose, we must watch, for I am sure she is not sane. Oh! what a wild look she has!'

'Go, my dear,' said the vicar, 'and see if she has kept her word. She seems quieter now.'

She went back trembling, while Mr. Wilton waited at the door, ready to follow if necessary. Presently his wife returned to him, and whispered,

- 'She was still dressed; but I remained with her until she was safe in bed. Oh! I do hope she will be able to sleep; but I fear the worst! She thinks he is here!'
 - 'What!'
- 'She thinks he is here. The man, you know, who—'
- 'Ah! the man who ruined her! Poor girl! That delusion shows her mind is affected.'
- 'She protested to me that the man was hiding somewhere in this house,' continued Mrs. Wilton. 'I begged her not to think so much

about him, and she promised me she would try to sleep—'

A noise in Virginia's chamber here caused them both to start, and strain their ears with terror-stricken intentness. Our heroine was moving about—a chair was overturned—the sobs and murmurs were louder than ever. They both rushed forward and reached the governess's room, just as the poor girl, who had again dressed herself, came out with a candle in her hand, and stood before them.

Oh! what a piteous sight it was! She was supremely beautiful. Her raven hair was unbound and dishevelled, falling in abundant masses upon her shoulders. So queenly was her shape, so full of grace and dignity her every motion, that when they saw the strange light that shot from her eyes, and heard her ravings, their commiseration for her had in it a touch of reverence.

'I must find Charles,' she said; 'he is waiting for me.'

They endeavoured to soothe and quiet her; but she put them aside, saying she must search for him throughout the house. What could they do? They resolved to indulge her insane fancy, and followed her, for it was useless to resist her will.

'He is in that bedroom!' she said, pointing to the chamber in which Harold was.

They trembled for the child, and kept close to her while she peered in every corner, and under the pallet where the little patient, who had been awakened by the unwonted commotion, lay watching her, his eyes wide open with perplexity and amazement. They accompanied her into the other bedrooms, and also downstairs, where she continued her quest with untiring vigilance.

'Now, my dear,' said Mrs. Wilton, compassionately, 'you have seen for yourself that he is nowhere about the house. Be persuaded to go to bed and think no more about him.'

At length she complied with their united entreaties, and the vicar's wife conducted her to her chamber, remaining with her there for a considerable time.

'I really think now, Ambrose,' said Mrs. Wilton, when at length she rejoined her husband, who was anxiously awaiting her, 'I really think now that she is convinced it was only a delusion. I left her falling into a sound sleep.'

The vicar's wife evidently had very little experience in the symptoms attending a mental disorder. Suddenly the good woman uttered a suppressed scream, crying, 'She has gone to Harold again!'

It was too true. They found her kneeling by the little sufferer's bed, clasping the boy tightly in a frantic embrace.

'They told me my child was dead; but this is he! My darling, I had lost you, as I had lost your father; but now I hold you to my bosom once again!'

The vivid scarlet—sad token of the fever through which he was passing, still lingered upon Harold's cheeks, contrasting with the pallid features of the poor deranged girl, who held him in her arms with delirious fondness.

- 'Miss Eagles,' said the boy feebly, as he endeavoured to get free, 'it is naughty of you to squeeze me so hard.'
 - 'My own—own child!' said Virginia.
- 'Miss Eagles,' protested little Harold, 'you hurt me.'

The father and mother were powerless. She did not heed their appeals. She shook them off like a giantess when they tried to draw her

away. She would not release the frightened boy from her embrace.

'This is my son that was lost and is found,' she said.

'No, Miss Eagles,' cried the little patient, zealous for the truth, 'I am not your son; I am my mamma's son.'

Meanwhile a neighbour had been aroused from his slumbers. He came into the chambers at this crisis, followed by a constable.

'I see,' said the latter under his breath, 'she's wanderin' in her mind, poor thing! Now, miss,' he added kindly, striding up to Virginia, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, 'you must leave holt o' that 'ere young gentleman.'

She did so immediately.

'You sit down on this cheer, miss,' continued the policeman, winking at the others, and suiting the action to the word.

She complied; but began to moan.

'Now, you must keep yourself cool, miss, and then you'll be actin' as a lovely young woman like you ought to act.'

She obeyed him, while Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, the constable, and the neighbour whispered together apart as to the next step to be taken. It was decided to get the young lady downstairs, and to sit with her, and wait for the dawn. Virginia was induced to accompany them into the sitting-room therefore. A fire was kindled, the gas lighted, and they grouped themselves at their will; Virginia standing with her back against the wall, and her head averted, while Mr. Wilton (his wife was upstairs with Harold) stood talking earnestly, but in whispers, with the two men, who sat eating and drinking certain refreshments that had been set before them by the servant.

'I am very much to blame,' said the vicar, 'not to have found out where her friends live. At present I cannot communicate with them, on that account; but I will make inquiries in the morning.'

'But you can't keep her on your hands till you have discovered them,' returned the neighbour. 'I should advise—'

At this moment Virginia darted towards the staircase; but she was intercepted by the policeman.

'Now, miss, don't you try that dodge, there's a good young lady. I ain't agoin' to let you

hembrace that 'ere little gentleman again, so I tell you plain. You bide here quiet, where you're in respectable company. Take a cheer, miss.' So spake the man in blue.

She sat down, but afterwards made several attempts to elude her watchers, being cleverly circumvented, however, in each instance.

'There ain't no doubt about the poor young lady bein' deranged, sir,' said the constable to Mr. Wilton. 'I'll tell you what you'd better do. 'As soon as people are stirring, we must take her before a surgeon—'

'That's the plan,' interrupted the neighbour.
'Take her before Mr. Rollick.'

'We'll take her before a surgeon, sir,' continued the man in blue, 'and get his certif'cate. Then I must have her, accordin' to the law, before a magistrate, and so the matter will be ended. She'll be looked after and kep' comfortable in the place appinted for sich unfort'nate people.'

But Mr. Wilton shook his head. He did not like the idea of shutting her up in an asylum.

'When I have discovered her friends—' he began.

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But the two men overruled him. The vicar went upstairs to consult his wife upon the subject. When he came down he said, 'Perhaps we had better do as you say, after all. At nine o'clock we will have a cab and take her before Mr. Rollick.'





CHAPTER XV.

MEDICAL OPINION.



BELIEVE this young lady was naturally of a melancholy temperament—am I right?'

The 'question was asked by Mr. Rollick, who was seated in his surgery, at a table littered with various books, papers, and printed forms, in some of which he was making entries from time to time. Virginia sat opposite to him, with her face buried in her hands, occasionally giving utterance to a low wail or an ejaculatory prayer. The policeman stood beside her, silent, attentive, stolid, and inflexible; while the vicar of Slagthorpe had taken up his position on the surgeon's left hand. The clergyman now replied, gravely,—

'She was.'

Ah! such persons are often predisposed

to some form of lunacy. Is this a case, let me ask, of disappointment in love, or has she been the subject of a misplaced affection?'

'Unfortunately-yes.'

'That,' said Mr. Rollick, still writing, 'is too often found a potent factor in the causes of insanity. And has she, to your knowledge, Mr. Wilton, recently sustained some severe shock to the system, calculated to disturb the balance of her faculties? I observe that her vital force is depressed—almost exhausted indeed, as if by excessive mental emotion.'

'I regret to say,' replied the vicar, 'that she has sustained more than one shock such as you describe.' And he then proceeded to relate the occurrences of the past few weeks—the death of Nurse Tenby at Duddenham; Virginia's return to Slagthorpe, and her admission to the union; the loss of her infant, the illness of little Harold; her chance encounter (for Mr. Wilton did not believe there had been a previous appointment made) with the stranger on the previous day; and lastly, the cautionary rebuke he had felt it his duty to administer, and which she had appeared to feel very acutely.

'Ah!' said the surgeon, when the other had concluded his narrative, 'the poor young lady has gone through a great deal of trouble, and her derangement has probably been brought on by some violent mental emotions or exciting passions called forth by those peculiar circumstances you have mentioned. Will you kindly describe, Mr. Wilton, any premonitory symptoms you may have noticed during the last few days?'

The clergyman then named a few particulars.

'I suspected as much,' returned Mr. Rollick, who had listened attentively, continuing to make at the same time entries upon the papers and printed forms before him. 'Uneasiness in the head, my dear sir, with confusion of ideas, agitation, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite, often precede this mental disorder. And you said, Mr. Wilton, that during the night she was the subject of various hallucinations?'

'I grieve to say she was, for she believed the man was hiding in my house, and insisted on searching for him in every part of the premises. She was also under the delusion that my poor boy, now suffering, as you are aware, from scarlet fever, was the child whom she lost while still an inmate of the workhouse, and whom I myself buried in Winterham cemetery.'

'Yes, sir, the young lady carried on like anythin', sir,' the constable acquiesced. 'She tried the artfullest dodges, sir, and I had to stop her, and tell her to "come out o' that" no end of times, sir.'

'I see; and there are indications of strong mental excitement at the present moment, Mr. Wilton,' remarked the surgeon, glancing at Virginia. 'My dear sir,' he added solemnly, turning to the clergyman and folding up one of the papers, 'this is an undoubted case of mania, and I have no hesitation in granting the required certificate. This man (indicating the constable) will take it with the young lady before a magistrate, who will then grant the order for—'

The clergyman here interposed.

'Mr. Rollick,' said he, 'excuse me one moment. You are quite sure there is no other course open to us under these painful circumstances? I feel some reluctance—'

'My dear sir,' returned the surgeon, 'all

experience goes to prove the desirability—nay, necessity, of seclusion in a case of insanity. You are aware, of course, that many of the objections which formerly existed against lunatic asylums have been removed. She will have every comfort and attention, I assure you.'

'I do not doubt it; but—'

'Speak freely, my dear sir,' said Mr. Rollick, rising and resting one plump hand upon the desk, while the other was extended upon his hip. 'I shall be only too glad to help you out of any difficulty if I am able to do so.'

Mr. Wilton bowed, and said,—

'It is quite evident that this young lady had been tenderly nurtured up to the time she left her home. I suspect that her friends, if not actually wealthy, are at any rate in very comfortable circumstances. Will they not feel hurt and indignant when they come to find that I have had her shut up, like an ordinary lunatic pauper, in a county asylum? If she could be placed in some respectable private family—'

- 'I am listening, my dear sir, attentively.'
- 'The charges I will cheerfully bear until

her relatives have been found, and their wishes are known,' said the vicar.

- 'Mr. Wilton, your proposal does you infinite—'
- 'Pardon me once more. I believe, Mr. Rollick, that you once lived at Carr House, the large stone building by the sea-side, and at that very time this young lady was staying there with Mrs. Tenby?'
 - 'She was.'
- 'And you conversed with Miss Eagles occasionally, perhaps, inasmuch as you lodged under the same roof with her?'
- 'We did have some conversation once or twice; and I now recollect being the bearer of a letter, which she asked me to post at Davenstone railway station. She begged me to keep the matter secret, and I have done so until the present moment,' said the surgeon; 'in fact, I had almost forgotten the circumstances.'
- 'I think I shall now be able,' said the clergyman, 'to find her friends without much difficulty. Thank you very much. I ought to have had more curiosity on the subject during the period when she was governess to

my children; but she seemed pained, you know, when any questions were asked, and—'

'My dear sir, I understand perfectly,' said Mr. Rollick.

'I may tell you,' continued Mr. Wilton, 'that on my way here this morning I telegraphed to the son of the late Mrs. Tenby, thinking he would be the most likely person to give me the information I required. But I can now go to work at once, on the clue you have just given me. I do not expect to find the young man whom she encountered yesterday, though I have sent to make inquiries throughout the neighbourhood. If he would make himself known—'

The surgeon shook his head.

'I fear we shall not get much help from that quarter, if he is the man who brought all this trouble upon her,' said he.

'Very likely not, but I wish we could lay our hands on him,' returned Mr. Wilton. 'He is lurking about the town somewhere. But what is to be done with this unfortunate girl in the meantime?' he went on. 'You would suggest that she be sent to the county asylum pro tempore—is that so?'

- 'Yes, that is the best course, I think.'
- 'And now, Mr. Rollick,' said the vicar, 'I want to ask you one other question. Let me beg you to give me your candid opinion.'
 - 'I will, my dear sir.'
- 'I want to ask you whether you consider there is any probability that this young lady will recover from her mental disorder? There is a bare possibility, I know; but is it probable?'
 - 'It is.'
 - 'I am rejoiced to hear it.'
- 'There is a firm conviction in my mind,' continued the surgeon, 'that if her relatives come forward and place her where she will have proper treatment, she will in time recover her sanity, and be little if any the worse for this attack.'
- 'You have lightened my heart of a great load, Mr. Rollick,' said the clergyman, with emphasis.
- 'I have given you my candid opinion,' continued the surgeon. 'In Miss Eagles's case there is no organic disease of the brain, but merely a functional derangement, a loss of vital force, which may happily be repaired in a well-regulated establishment. You are

aware, my dear sir, that the treatment of the insane is now conducted upon the most humane and philosophic principles. Restraint is very seldom resorted to, and every means are used to employ and to gratify the inmates. My own conviction is that restraint is never necessary, never justifiable, and always injurious in all cases of lunacy.'

- 'So say I,' the vicar acquiesced.
- 'And on that principle all the best institutions are conducted,' continued Mr. Rollick.
 'The treatment of insanity, as pursued at the present day, is properly divided into two parts.
 One of these might be termed the direct, the other the indirect, but they are generally called the *medical* and the *moral* treatment. The medical treatment consists in the use of such medicines as, in each particular case, will be likely to restore the body to a healthy condition.'
- 'An admirable treatment too!' exclaimed the vicar. 'May I ask what are the principal remedies employed?'
- 'The principal remedies,' answered the surgeou, 'are stimulants and tonics. As to the moral treatment, it includes the exercise of a

mild but firm directive and disciplinary power over the actions of the patient, by which he is gradually restored to healthful habits and wholesome self-restraint.'

'Yes?'

- 'And further, the attempt is made to win him from his vagaries and delusions to those mental and manual pursuits which give solidity, strength, and activity to the normal mind.'
- 'I should imagine,' remarked Mr. Wilton, 'that the moral treatment has even more efficacy than the medical—is that so?'
- 'Decidedly, my dear sir; and hence it is that the heads of lunatic asylums require to be men of vigour and capacity.'
 - 'And the attendants?'
- 'A great improvement has taken place in regard to them also; they are a class of persons peculiarly fitted for their work by reason of their intelligence and good nature,' said Mr. Rollick.
- 'Those qualities are much needed, and a love of truth besides,' remarked the clergyman.
- 'Ay! of all the prevalent errors in regard to the insane there is none other fraught with such evil consequences as the impression that

they are most easily governed by deception. This course of conduct, however, usually defeats the very object for the attainment of which it is pursued; for as a rule those who suffer from any mental malady are suspicious, watchful for deceit, and not obtuse, either, in the power of detecting it; and if it be but once perceived by them, all confidence in any one who has practised it is lost.'

- 'Most true,' said Mr. Wilton.
- 'I cannot but believe,' the surgeon continued, 'that the dislike, and even hatred, of their nearest relatives and dearest friends, which is a common and prominent characteristic in persons of unsound mind, may doubtless in a great measure be justly attributed to this grossly faulty method of treatment. The insane are much like children. The same policy which will ensure a cheerful obedience from a child will meet with a like response from a person suffering under mental disease. As the mature mind must assert its prerogative over the immature, so the sound mind must assume and maintain a directing superiority over the mind that is unsound.'
 - 'I agree with you,' said the vicar.

'But this superiority,' Mr. Rollick went on, 'cannot be retained without kindness, candour, truthfulness, and unfaltering firmness. Let no false word escape the lips. Let no promise be made hastily; but, being made, let it be scrupulously fulfilled.'

'And it is in accordance with such maxims that modern establishments are conducted, if I understand you aright?' remarked Mr. Wilton.

'It is,' replied the surgeon, 'so far as my own observation and experience have gone; for, as I said just now, a decided improvement has taken place in recent years in the treatment of patients—an improvement which may be comprehended in these two brief generic statements—first, the almost absolute disuse of mechanical appliances for bodily restraint—'

'I am listening, Mr. Rollick.'

'— And secondly, the introduction of the conveniences, comforts, and, to some extent, the luxuries that appertain to civilised life, into the apartments of the patients, and to all parts of the hospital establishments where such means will benefit them. By this gentle and judicious treatment a large increase has taken

place in the number of cases of insanity which have been cured, especially in the early stages of the disease.'

'Then there is hope for Miss Eagles.'

'Great hope, I should say,' returned the surgeon. 'With careful management there is every probability that her reason will be restored in due time.'

The clergyman was in the act of taking leave of Mr. Rollick, and the policeman, having received the medical certificate, was about to remove Virginia to the cab, with a view to taking her before the magistrates, previous to her admission to the county asylum, when a sharp, shrill outcry from her lips caused them all to start. At the same moment Mr. Rollick's servant entered, saying, 'A gentleman named Laxey, sir, wishes to see you. He says he has come on behalf of the young lady's parents.'





CHAPTER XVI.

VALENTINE'S NARRATIVE.

FEELING of relief and satisfaction mingled with the excitement which these few words occasioned, not only in the mind of Mr. Wilton, who overheard them, but also in the surgeon himself.

'I will go and speak to the man, my dear sir, if you will kindly excuse me for one moment,' said the latter, addressing the clergyman, and moving towards the door. He felt glad that he and his friend were about to be freed from all responsibility in regard to the beautiful girl who still sat cowering upon her chair, guarded by the policeman. Whatever might now be done with her, it would be the act of her own parents or of their representative, and no blame could hereafter attach to himself or to the vicar.

Mr. Wilton bowed in acquiescence, and the surgeon left the room. The latter, however, returned almost immediately, and whispered,

'I have seen him. He is a fine young fellow, and a great friend of hers. He wishes for an interview, and really, on the whole, I think it might have a beneficial effect upon the young lady if I brought him in here at once. I will go back and fetch him, my good sir. Miss Eagles,' he continued, turning to Virginia, and speaking in a soothing, compassionate tone, 'you are going to see an old acquaintance. Now, you must cheer up, and give him a hearty welcome; but do not excite yourself, whatever else you do, there's a dear young lady.'

He went out a second time, and re-entered the surgery, after the lapse of a few moments, in company with Valentine Laxey, who had been prepared beforehand to witness a serious change in the condition of the mayor's hapless daughter.

The Councillor's figure, as we have stated in a previous chapter, was tall and slim, his eyes wonderfully bright and clear, the expression of his plain features manly and honest. The sight of him, though it strangely agitated Virginia for a minute or two, yet seemed to do her good. When he went and sat down beside her, took her small hand between his broad palms, and began to talk to her, she gradually became more collected, and less irrational.

Laxey showed wonderful tact in this instance; and while the clergyman and the surgeon stood by, watching the workings of Virginia's face with fixed intentness, they observed with pleasure the salutary effect which his arrival had produced. Indeed, Mr. Rollick said to himself that it was extremely doubtful whether any other presence than that of this young man would have been so helpful to her in these melancholy circumstances.

By and by the Councillor rose from his chair, and then the three men withdrew together to the other end of the surgery, and began to converse in subdued tones.

'It is most heartrending,' said Laxey, who could scarcely restrain his emotion, 'to see the havoc which a series of misfortunes have made in that beautiful girl.'

^{&#}x27;It is indeed,' said the clergyman.

- 'A very affecting scene, sir, altogether,' Mr. Rollick assented.
 - 'When I saw her yesterday-'

Valentine was here arrested in his narrative by the look of amazement which he observed upon the countenances of his interlocutors. He was perplexed beyond measure, but supposed the tumult in their minds had disturbed their faculties in some degree, and he resumed,

- 'When I saw her yesterday, I little dreamed I should next find her in such a woful situation as this.'
 - 'Surely, sir, you are not-'
- 'Perhaps, Mr. Laxey,' said the vicar, seeing that his friend hesitated in confusion, 'I had better explain. We were under the impression that the person she encountered so unexpectedly yesterday was the man who had—'
- 'I understand you,' said Valentine. 'No! that man's whereabouts we have not yet discovered; but we will find him yet—we will! His name is Dangerfield—Charles Dangerfield. I perceive, gentlemen,' he continued, 'that Miss Eagles has not made you acquainted with the whole of her sad story.'

- 'She has not, sir, unfortunately,' returned Mr. Rollick.
- 'Had she done so,' said Mr. Wilton, 'her friends would long ago have been communicated with. I have only learned this morning that some of them reside at Davenstone.'
 - 'Her father is the mayor of that town.'
 - 'You surprise me!' exclaimed the clergyman.
- 'I could see she was respectably connected,' said the surgeon.
- 'Mr. Eagles is possessed of considerable wealth,' continued Valentine, 'and, of course, all that money can do will now be done to procure for his daughter the very best medical advice and the utmost attention. When he arrives here we shall learn what his wishes are. I should have told you, that when I parted from Miss Eagles yesterday, I immediately wrote to inform him that his daughter was found; but, you understand, he has no idea of her present condition. This is his answer,'—

The Councillor drew a telegram from his pocket, and read,

'Andrew Eagles, Davenstone, to Valentine

Laxey, Ship Hotel, Winterham:—Overjoyed at the news you send. Felicia and myself will start by train at once.'

'As soon as I received this,' said Laxey, addressing the clergyman, 'I walked straight to your house, sir, for the purpose of having an interview with Miss Eagles. I was then informed, to my unspeakable grief, of the incidents of the past night, and of her removal for the purpose of obtaining medical opinion, and I came on here as rapidly as the cab could bring me.'

'The lady mentioned in the telegram is, I presume, her-'

'Her only sister: The two young ladies have always been devotedly attached to one another,' said Valentine. 'I dread the effects of the shock when they meet again. Oh! if they could but have foreseen what would be the consequence of that marriage ceremony. It is a very singular circumstance that her father for some time previously had been opposed to Mr. Dangerfield's suit, and wished to prevent the wedding. The man is an artist, you know.'

'Mr. Dangerfield?'

- 'Yes. Miss Eagles first saw him at a tea party that was held at Thacker's Yard. I am told he is a good-looking man, tall and broadchested, and rather clever in his profession. He was introduced to her, and it transpired - that he had been sent down from London by the editors of an illustrated journal-I believe it was "The Picturesque"-to make drawings of our great procession, which took place just at that time. He succeeded in making a decided impression upon her heart. afterwards an accident happened which might have been attended with serious consequences to the young lady, but this man was fortunate enough to avert the blow, and thus the hold he had upon her was materially strengthened. The mayor invited him to dinner—'
 - 'I infer from your remarks,' said Mr. Rollick, 'that he represented himself as an unmarried man?'
 - 'He must have done,' said Mr. Wilton.
 - 'He did. Well, as I was saying, the mayor invited him to dinner. He then had the effrontery to give the highest references as to character and position. One of these references was his employer, another a patron of

his, and the third a highly respectable clergyman in Chelsea. It is a most extraordinary circumstance, but all these references spoke of him, when they were applied to, in very satisfactory terms. Mr. Eagles also visited the man in his own apartments, and was highly gratified by what he saw and heard. The result was, that the mayor consented to an engagement between him and his daughter. After a time—'

- 'Excuse me one moment,' the vicar interposed. 'I cannot understand how any persons of position, such as those references you have named, could have given a favourable account of him. Either they had no sufficient knowledge of the man, and therefore should have refrained from commending him, or else they told a tissue of deliberate falsehoods.'
- 'I was about to make the same remark myself,' said the surgeon.
- 'The matter is a mystery to me,' returned Valentine. 'Perhaps the mayor can clear it up when he comes. I know he has employed himself for some time in making renewed investigations, although I have not learned with what result. Anyhow, he was satisfied at that

period, and they became engaged. Afterwards, when the wedding-day was fixed, there was some dispute as to where the ceremony should take place. Mr. Eagles, who is a man of much firmness and decision of character, would not yield to the preferences of the others, and it would appear that warm words passed between him and Mr. Dangerfield—the artist also having a good deal of obstinacy in his composition. There was something like a quarrel.'

'Yes?'

- 'Well, there came an anonymous letter to the mayor a day or two afterwards, making certain reflections against the artist, and throwing out plain hints that he ought to be sent about his business.'
- 'Ah! the writer was aware, no doubt. that the man was already married,' said Mr. Rollick.
 - 'It would appear so,' the vicar concurred.
- 'Very likely he was. Strangely enough it was suspected by some that I had written that letter,' continued Laxey. 'The father spoke to me on the subject, and so did Miss Felicia Eagles, but I told them I knew nothing about it. I am not such a meddlesome fool as that comes to, I hope. But it had the effect

of increasing the mayor's dislike to Dangerfield. As he was not able, however, to obtain proof of any trick or double dealing on the part of the artist, the wedding took place in London. The bride returned home to her father most unexpectedly three days afterwards, for reasons with which I believe you are acquainted. The rest you know.'

'We are much obliged to you for your narrative, sir,' said Mr. Rollick.

'But I have not quite done,' returned Valentine; 'and what remains to be told is the most singular part of the story. It turns out that this very man whom we have suspected of bigamy, has found a champion and agent in a friend of mine named Melody. My friend has hinted, in a cautious manner, that we have all mistaken Dangerfield's character, that the man has employed him to search for Miss Eagles, and that he would be prepared to explain every thing as soon as the young lady was found. I therefore wrote to him yesterday—'

'You mean Mr. Melody?'

'Yes; I wrote to tell him I had met with her. It is quite probable that he may come forward on behalf of the artist and clear up the whole mystery. And now, sir,' continued Laxey, addressing the surgeon, 'since all that money, skill, and attention can do must be applied towards her recovery, and since I am acting for Mr. Eagles until he himself appears, will you kindly give me your best advice?'

'I will,' replied Mr. Rollick. 'The young lady, in my opinion, must be secluded for some little time. All experience goes to prove the desirability, and even necessity, of placing a person who is mentally afflicted in this manner, where he or she will be carefully tended by duly qualified nurses and guardians.'

'Yes?'

'The first thing to be done, therefore, is to take her to be examined by another surgeon.'

'Is that necessary?'

'Quite indispensable, sir. The law declares that "every person, not being a pauper, shall be certified to be insane by two physicians or surgeons, who shall examine such patient separately, and shall have no interest in the asylum in which such patient is to be confined. In the case of a pauper, however, the certificate of one surgeon is sufficient."'

- 'Ah! I understand!' said Valentine; 'until I appeared on the scene Miss Eagles was regarded as a—'
 - 'A pauper? yes.'
- 'If her father should desire to place her in a private family, must the same preliminaries be gone through?'
- 'They must. Orders and medical certificates have to be procured for the care of one single patient similar to those used for admission into licensed houses. Both private and public asylums must also be visited by a medical attendant and visitors appointed by justices, several times in the year. But private retreats for the wealthy classes are assimilated in their arrangements to ordinary dwelling-houses. I should recommend—'

At this moment there was a loud ringing at the front door bell. A pause of trembling expectation followed, for they all divined in their inmost hearts who the new arrivals were.

A servant entered and announced—'Mr. Eagles and Miss Felicia Eagles!'



CHAPTER XVII.

'MY DAUGHTER A COUNTESS!'

HERE are they waiting?' asked Mr. Rollick, addressing the servant.

'I showed 'em into the drawin'-room, sir.'

'Quite right; it was very thoughtful on your part. Say I will be with them immediately. Now, gentlemen,' the surgeon continued, turning towards Mr. Wilton and Valentine,—'before they see this unfortunate young lady, it would be advisable, I think, to send the constable about his business. What say you?'

'Most decidedly,' returned the clergyman.
'The man's services are no longer required, and it would pain her friends extremely to find her in his custody. Dismiss him, by all means, Mr. Rollick.'

'I was about to suggest that step myself,'

said the Councillor. 'Mr. Eagles would be very indignant if he saw the policeman here.'

The man in blue was accordingly told that his assistance could now be dispensed with, and that he might go. He left the surgery with a somewhat chapfallen and disappointed look upon his stolid features, and then Mr. Rollick, Laxey, and the vicar whispered hurriedly together for a few moments.

There was a small, well-furnished sitting-room close by. It was decided to get Virginia into that room, and to place her under the care of the housekeeper, who had gained some experience in former years among persons of unsound mind, and would be able to pay her the attentions she so much needed previous to the interview with her father and sister.

Valentine and Mr. Wilton accomplished the delicate and difficult work of inducing our heroine to walk into the sitting-room. They had not so much trouble with her as they expected. It seemed as if the very presence of Laxey calmed and soothed her. She listened intently to the sound of his cheery voice, and obeyed his directions implicitly.

The surgeon, meanwhile, had gone into the drawing-room.

He saw there a gentleman apparently nearly sixty years of age, dressed in a sober suit of grey. His forehead was high and receding, the nose large, his keen blue eyes full and prominent. He wore a trimly cut beard, perfectly white, and his face indicated much energy and resolution. When he advanced to meet Mr. Rollick, the latter noticed that he was surprisingly active in all his movements.

'My daughter is here, I believe?' said the mayor; 'I have heard she—'

He could say no more. A great effort had been made to control his emotion, but he found it impossible to do so. He waved his hand towards the lady by his side, saying—

'This is her sister.'

Felicia was trembling violently, and as she turned her large grey eyes upon the surgeon, he could read in every line of her features the fact that she knew the worst. She could only exclaim, in a voice that vibrated with intense feeling,

- 'Take me to her; oh! take me to her!'
- 'Mr. Laxey shall take you, Miss Eagles,'

he replied, 'when you have composed yourself a little. Remember how important it is, for her sake, that you should summon all your self-command. Mr. Laxey has gone in now to prepare her mind as well as he can for the interview. She likes to have him with her.'

Now, reader, it is not our purpose, even if we had the ability to do so, to describe the scene when the two sisters met. Valentine closed the door behind him when he led Felicia in, leaving outside in the other apartment the mayor, the surgeon, and the clergyman. We will remain without, in their company, by your kind leave. Half an hour elapsed, and then the Councillor came softly out, his eyes bedewed with tears, and beckoned the father into the sitting-room. The latter summoned all his fortitude and followed. When Mr. Rollick deemed it expedient, he tapped gently at the door, as a reminder that, in the interests of his patient, it was advisable not to prolong the interview to any greater length. Presently the men came out, reporting that the two sisters and the housekeeper wished to stay together for a while.

Gravely, and with hushed voices, the men

stood and conversed near one of the windows. Suddenly Laxey uttered an exclamation. He was looking out into the street.

'Surely,' said he, 'I know that man walking towards the house! Heavens! We shall now hear news! It is Mr. Melody!'

Yes: in a brief space of time the innkeeper was shown into the room.

We know his face and figure well; the last twelve months have scarcely altered them in the least. A middle-aged man, round-shouldered, splay-footed, and weak-kneed; a sallow complexion, a long thin nose, and well-oiled black hair waving down below his shoulders, -so that altogether as he addresses the master of the house, he looks more like an Italian than an Englishman. Very warily he insinuates himself among the company, shaking hands with the Councillor, bowing to the mayor, and then, on being introduced by Mr. Rollick to the clergyman, bowing to him also. Melody's manners, as of old, insensibly win favour and confidence. He too has heard of the affliction that has befallen Virginia; he now, with much feeling, asks how it fares with her, and discreetly offers to Mr. Eagles his respectful condolence. Thus by degrees the innkeeper comes to the important business he has on hand.

He first intimates with great prudence to the stout Yorkshireman that *that* business had immediate reference to his elder daughter, and he perhaps might wish to hear him privately.

'No, Mr. Melody; we are all friends here. You may speak freely before these gentlemen.'

'I will, sir.'

It was noticed that the prosperous innkeeper spoke to Mr. Eagles with profound respect, more respect indeed than the difference in rank seemed to require. Valentine, who had seen the two men together on many previous occasions, told himself that this difference was more marked than it had ever been.

'I will, sir,' repeated Melody. 'What I have to say will fill you, as it does myself, with the hope that, although heavy trials have fallen upon this young lady, yet, if Providence should restore her reason, she may enjoy a more favoured lot than is given to ordinary human beings.'

The mayor inclined his head with austere dignity as he lounged in an easy chair. Valen-

tine and the surgeon stood a little behind him, Mr. Wilton sat on the innkeeper's right hand. The latter leaned forward in a strange excitement, while the others fastened their gaze upon him most intently.

'Permit me, sir,' the innkeeper went on, in the same tone of deferential eagerness, 'permit me to take your thoughts back for a moment to that memorable night when the young lady returned to your house so unexpectedly. If you recollect, sir, she spoke to you of a startling confession which had been made to her by Mr. Dangerfield—a confession which, she said, had proved to her beyond a doubt that she was not his lawful wife?'

'I recollect it perfectly.'

'She told you, sir, that though she loved him with her whole heart, yet she could not remain with him in those altered circumstances—that she had left him immediately the revelation was made, and that she would never return to him again.'

'She did.'

'Then, sir, you asked her to tell the substance of the confession she spoke of. You had gathered from her words that some deception had beeu practised—some fraud committed. You wished to be informed what it was she had found out which made her think it was not a legal marriage. She had been duped; but how? You desired her to explain.'
'Yes.'

'The young lady, however, declined to give you the substance of that revelation. She feared you would take proceedings of some kind against the gentleman who had deluded her, and she intended to shield him. She declared that she would keep the matter, whatever it was, a profound secret, for his sake, for yours, and for hers.'

'It was so.'

'Now, sir,' said Melody, rising from his chair, and speaking with great agitation, 'I am prepared to tell you what that confession was! He had married her under an assumed name. He was of much higher rank than she supposed when he led her to the altar. His style and title was not Charles Dangerfield, artist, but the Right Honourable the Earl of Garlford!'

It is impossible adequately to describe the effect which these words produced. The

mayor started to his feet, and gazed at his informant in speechless amazement and incredulity. An exclamation of wonder burst from the lips of Valentine, while Mr. Wilton and the surgeon looked on as if thunderstruck.

'The Earl of Garlford!' they cried. 'Impossible!'

'But it is a fact, gentlemen,' returned the innkeeper warmly.

'Are you telling me this,' asked the stout Yorkshireman, 'on sufficient authority? Let me beg you to inform me how you come to know a matter which has been so carefully concealed from me, the lady's own father, all this time?'

'The answer is ready, sir,' replied Melody. 'It is this: During the time that the earl's coach ran between Davenstone and Bayborough, his lordship was pleased to honour me with a very flattering intimacy. I conducted him, at his desire, to all the places of interest in the town, and was his constant companion indeed nearly every day. When the drag ceased to run in September last, his lordship was pleased to say—I remember his words as distinctly as if they were spoken

only yesterday—"I wish to remark, Melody, that I am exceedingly gratified by the manner in which you have carried out my instructions from the first day on which the four-in-hand started until now. I also thank you for the many attentions you have paid me, and the time you have bestowed since I commenced this undertaking." His lordship afterwards sent Mrs. Melody and myself a handsome present, and a kind note, saying, it was "a memento of the enterprise just brought to a successful termination, and also a slight acknowledgment of our very valuable services." Those were his lordship's own words. I do not repeat them, sir, in a spirit of vainglory, but to show you that the earl had taken me a great deal into his confidence. Mark you, sir, I had no knowledge 'or suspicion at that time that his lordship was in the habit of visiting at your house under an assumed name, nor was I then aware that the Mr. Dangerfield who had married Miss Eagles was none other than my noble and right honourable patron. But one day, about two months ago, his lordship did me the honour to send for me to Garlford Castle. He then told me, sir, the facts I have related to you. He said his search for the lady had not been successful, that his secret had been an intolerable burden to him, that he believed I was a man to be trusted, and that he wished for my assistance. So long, he said, as the lady remained concealed, or refused to reveal his name and title to you, he did not feel called upon to make the matter public; but when the lady was found, he would own before all men what he had done. I telegraphed this morning to Garlford Castle, and then came straight on here.'

'But,' said the sagacious mayor, 'my daughter told me that what the earl confessed proved beyond a doubt that she was not his lawful wife. His lordship, therefore, must have done something more than avow his actual rank and title, because the mere fact of having married her under an assumed name did not render the ceremony null and void.'

'There was no other avowal made, sir, than the one I have mentioned,' returned Melody. 'I suspect the lady had the impression that if a man marries under an assumed name, the marriage is invalid.'

- 'That was the idea—it was!' said Valentine, emphatically.
- 'Most ladies have that impression, certainly,' said Mr. Eagles.
 - 'They have,' the surgeon acquiesced.
- 'I can testify,' said Mr. Wilton, 'after nearly thirty years' experience as a parish priest, that the prevailing notion among the fair sex is that a union celebrated under such circumstances is illegal. Eight women out of every ten would have come to the same conclusion as this lady did.'
- 'Then, in such a case as this, I suppose all that the law requires is that the man's identity be established beyond a doubt?'
 - 'That is all that is needed.'
- 'Well, then,' said Melody, 'there will be no difficulty in proving that Charles Danger-field and Lord Garlford are one and the same person. Besides, his lordship assured me that if the lady were found, he would willingly be married to her a second time, if necessary.'
 - 'Can it be possible?' cried the mayor,

pacing the room in great excitement, and speaking to himself rather than to the company—' My daughter a countess!'

'Yes! she is Countess of Garlford beyond all question!' the others exclaimed in a breath.





CHAPTER XVIII.

SOUTHWARD, O!

HE mayor now signified his intention of conveying the unfortunate countess to the south of England, where he intended to place her in a certain private establishment highly recommended by Mr. Rollick. The surgeon having no close carriage of his own, Mr. Eagles asked him kindly to despatch a messenger to the nearest hotel for a car, remarking,—

'We shall be able, I believe, to catch the next train for the south.'

At this point Mr. Melody interposed.

'I beg, sir,' said he, in his most winning tones, 'to remind you that the countess's rightful protector and guardian is the Right Honourable the Earl of Garlford. His lord-ship has—'

- 'Very true,' interrupted the stout Yorkshireman, 'but at present the countess is under my care. His lordship has given you no authority to act on his behalf; and even if he had, I would not yield up my daughter to any man except her husband, and he has not yet claimed her.'
 - 'But, sir, his lordship will do so.'
 - 'Probably,' returned Mr. Eagles.
- 'I have telegraphed to his lordship,' said the innkeeper. 'It is true I cannot say whether he was at Garlford Castle or not. There may perhaps be some delay. Of course, recent events in connection with the countess were quite unforeseen, and certainly I am not empowered to give any directions, but—'
- 'If I may give my opinion,' said the vicar, 'the proper person to have charge of the countess in this emergency is her own father.'
 - 'Undoubtedly,' said Mr. Rollick.
- 'That is to say,' remarked Valentine, with much vehemence, 'until Lord Garlford puts in his claim.'
- 'Which his lordship will do at the earliest possible moment,' added Melody.
 - 'You think he is fond of her?'

- 'His lordship is passionately devoted to her, to my certain knowledge,' he replied.
- 'But, supposing the countess could be consulted, would she wish to return to him?' asked the surgeon.
- 'I think she would,' returned Mr. Wilton. 'During the time she resided in my house, we frequently heard her speak of him in terms of great affection.'
- 'Well,' said the mayor, 'as soon as his lordship comes and asserts his right as her husband I shall be willing, although she left him, and notwithstanding the deception he practised, to give my daughter into his keeping. Meanwhile, I shall act for her to the best of my own judgment.'

As the Yorkshireman declined Mr. Rollick's repeated offers of hospitality with many thanks, on the plea of haste and the urgency of the case, a messenger was despatched for a car, and Felicia instructed to prepare the countess for the journey.

While the gentlemen were waiting, Valentine said, 'I wonder what the earl's motives were for assuming another name and character in the first instance?'

'I suspect,' replied the astute mayor, 'that at the outset it was merely a whim. His lordship was dull with four hours on his hands every day in a small town like Davenstone, and with positively nothing to do. He had a restless craving for praise, and the idea occurred to him that by personating another man he could mingle more freely with the town's-people, observe them more narrowly, and, above all, could lead them on to a conversation about himself and his thoroughbreds. At that time the earl was excessively vain.'

'I think, sir,' said Melody, 'his lordship had another motive besides the one you mention. You know, I used to accompany him in his daily rambles through the town, and I remember, one afternoon when he happened to see you and the young ladies in the street, he clutched my arm and said in an eager voice, "Who are they?" I told him it was Mr. Eagles and his two daughters. He said, "The dark one is a beauty, by Jove!" I told him she was considered the belle of Davenstone. We continued talking about her; and when he found out that she went to Thacker's Yard, he seemed to ponder the matter in his mind. I

believe he laid his plans for getting into her society, and for making love to her, from that moment.'

'It was a bold, reckless thing to do,' said Mr. Eagles. 'He must have known that the chances of detection were a hundred to one against him. Indeed, it is most extraordinary that the trick was not discovered by either you or me.'

'Certainly, I never suspected him,' said the innkeeper. 'But then, it happened to be the "fair week," you know, and I was much busier than usual. Crowds of people were coming in . and out, and lots of strangers were in the town. At the back of my hotel there is a passage leading to an unfrequented thoroughfare. At certain times this passage was always clear. His lordship got away through my back gate, and once off the premises it was easier to carry out the deception. There was a good deal of excitement in the town, too, over the procession, and altogether he was favoured by circumstances. He slipped out when the coast was clear. Afterwards he took rooms at the "Golden Horse," and by degrees gave up driving the coach, so as to have more opportunities for seeing Miss Eagles. My own opinion is that at the outset his lordship didn't care much whether he was detected or not; but when he became seriously in love with the young lady, he took the utmost precautions. He did not know how to draw back, then; and so he carried his purpose out to the very end. He got himself up for the part quite elaborately. I have heard that he was always considered particularly clever in that way at private theatricals. One evening, I had been attending a sale at the auction room of the "Golden Horse"—the inn where his lordship had apartments—you were with me. Valentine.'

'I remember it distinctly.'

'We were walking along, and his lordship was right in front of us; but I failed to recognise him. My friend here said to me, "Who is that swell?" and I replied, "Mr. Dangerfield, the artist." So you see he was always careful to maintain the character he had assumed in every detail, the better to deceive us all.'

'One man, however,' continued Melody, 'did recognise his lordship. It was a butcher

named Wabsale. He found him out quite by accident—met him, I believe, when he was off his guard. The butcher afterwards came to my hotel and had an interview with my patron. I was greatly surprised at the time; but supposed it had reference to his lordship's pecuniary difficulties. I presume he then received a bribe to purchase his silence. Wabsale had some ill-feeling against you, sir, over that matter of the city fifty; and as he had a mistaken idea that the earl's intentions towards Miss Eagles were not honourable, he perhaps hoped some trouble might come upon your family. The butcher had never forgiven you, particularly since you committed his son Saul for trial at the assizes on that charge of assault.'

'I did my duty in both instances—nothing more,' said Mr. Eagles. 'But with regard to his lordship, it is rather singular that a nobleman who had aspired to ally himself with the highest in rank, and who paid his early addresses to none but proud, high-born women, should after all condescend to choose his mate out of the manufacturing class. It was a departure from his first principles, certainly.'

'But it is only another illustration,' added the mayor, in a lower key, 'of the inconsistency of the man. He was the most changeable of mortals, and always flying from one extreme to another.'

'The old countess drove him to it by her reproaches,' said Melody. 'His lordship told me himself that the dowager was angry with him about the four-in-hand—said he was demeaning himself—that she really believed he would rather be among coalheavers and hodmen than keep his proper position in life, and so on. She scolded his lordship because he said he had been playing billiards with a tallow-chandler. By unwisely opposing her will to his, she made him take the very course she wished him to avoid, for he was naturally obstinate.'

'It occurs to me,' said Valentine, 'that the reports circulated in Davenstone at that time about the earl's character and antecedents came to the countess's mind when his lord-ship avowed to her his real name and position. She had been told that Lord Garlford always looked above rather than below himself in seeking an alliance—that he would never

dream of proposing to untitled women. The recollection would confirm her in the opinion that the marriage had not been a legal one; and it would appear that she did not stay for an explanation, but left his lordship immediately.'

'I had the curiosity,' said Melody, 'to go the other day to inspect the marriage registers. The wedding took place, you know, at St. John's Church, Bayswater. I had seen his lordship's handwriting many times (in fact I took a note of his with me), and compared it with the entry in the registers. It was the same handwriting, without a doubt.'

'He signed himself Charles Dangerfield?' said the surgeon, interrogatively.

'Yes.'

'That was not his family name, I presume?' said the vicar.

'Oh! dear, no!' returned Mr. Eagles, quickly. 'Nothing at all like it, though I forget at this moment what the family name is.'

'Well,' said the innkeeper, 'I have found out why he adopted that name.'

They all listened eagerly as he proceeded—

'Lord Garlford, I must tell you, was very

fond of painting, and was intimate with a good many artists in London. It appears that during the fair week he received information that an artist named Dangerfield had been sent down by the editor of the *Picturesque* to make drawings of our procession. The young man was a good deal like his lordship in face and figure, and as he knew that Miss Eagles loved the fine arts, he chose to personate him at Thacker's Yard. The genuine Charles Dangerfield had then returned to London, quite ignorant of the freak his lordship was indulging in.'

'I now understand,' said the mayor, 'how I came to be misled by the editor of the *Picturesque* when I went to make inquiries. Mr. Harold Thwaites was speaking of one person, and I was referring to another.'

'But I believe,' said the councillor, addressing Mr. Eagles, 'that on the occasion when his lordship first dined at your house, he gave you two other references; did he not?'

'He did; he mentioned the Rev. Dr. Tuckett and the Honourable Robert Chutney.'

'You made inquiries of them also, I think?'

'Yes, but fortune favoured his lordship in

those instances, too,' said the Yorkshireman, with a smile. 'The Rev. Dr. Tuckett was an aged and infirm man, and people said he was past his work and ought to resign his living. The doctor did not agree with them;—he is dead now, poor man!—and to the last deluded himself with the idea that he knew every one of his parishioners. He was very touchy on that subject. It is a fact that his lordship had taken rooms in his parish and attended the church once or twice—all the rest was fancy.'

- 'How about the Honourable Robert Chutney?' asked Valentine.
- 'Oh! he was an intimate friend of Lord Garlford's, and quite unprincipled where the honour of women was concerned. He knew that the earl was playing one of his pranks, and they had laid their plans together to deceive us all.'
- 'But he was afterwards his lordship's "best man" at the wedding, I have heard,' said the councillor.
- 'He was. He took care, however, to say no more than he had been instructed to do.'

The car having now been brought to the front door, there ensued cordial leave-takings and mutual good wishes. Mr. Wilton and the

surgeon were told by the Yorkshireman that he should feel hurt, after all their kindness to him and his, if they did not come and spend a month or two at his house at Davenstone. They said it would give them much pleasure to do so. Meanwhile, Melody having started for the railway station on foot, the countess was carefully placed in the vehicle. Felicia followed, then Valentine, and last of all the mayor himself. In a few minutes they were all speeding southward.





CHAPTER XIX.

MR. WILTON AT DAVENSTONE.

HE Earl of Garlford was abroad at

the time the innkeeper despatched the telegram to the castle, and consequently some two or three days elapsed before the news that the countess was found. reached the capricious peer. He immediately returned to England and sent for Melody, of whom he learned the particulars already recorded. The lord did not hesitate a moment as to the course he would take. There was but one course open to him, indeed, it he was an honourable man, and that was to acknowledge his wife openly, before all the world. If the reader has come to the conclusion that this nobleman was altogether heartless and unprincipled, we have drawn his character with but scant ability. No! Despite his indiscretions VOL. III.

and follies, the earl was neither a roue nor a villain. This is what he did. Proceeding to the mayor's house by the churchyard—the large red-brick mansion with stone-facings, where he had visited so often in the character of Charles Dangerfield, Esq., special artist of the Picturesque newspaper, the house where the crucial test of 'a little dinner en famille' had been so satisfactorily applied, and where he had formally proposed for the hand of Virginia—he there confessed to Mr. Eagles the deception he had practised, declared his deep and unalterable affection for his daughter, claimed her at his hands as his lawful wife, and announced his settled purpose of acknowledging her before all men as the Countess of Garlford.

The peer, moreover, was faithful to his promise. For a time, indeed, the countess was kept in needful seclusion, where she gradually regained her health of body and mind. Then, her reason quite restored, she and her husband withdrew together to the south of France.

The scandal-mongers no longer endeavour to bring the earl into contempt as one whose whole life is foolish and frivolous, wanting every element of manliness and strength. They admit that his character has improved—that he is less egotistical, less vain and wilful. They maintain, however, that his conduct is inconsistent to the last, inasmuch as he who had been notorious for his fickleness as a lover, fluttering from flower to flower with unceasing restlessness, has now become a pattern to all spouses for steadfastness and devotion.

The lord has hardly yet forgiven himself for unintentionally bringing so much suffering upon his wife through his vagaries. He has also confessed to her privately that he lost his peace of mind as soon as he stooped to artifice and systematic falsehood. Never could he be light - hearted and gay, his self-respect was gone, conscience tormented him, he was a prey to ceaseless anxiety. There are two well-known lines, dear reader, which sum up the moral of this tale of mine; they are these:—

'Let all thy converse be sincere, Thy conscience as the noon-day clear.'

By following that counsel we shall escape much sorrow and possible disgrace, besides doing less injury to our neighbours. Lord Garlford has certainly learned wisdom by his past errors. He has discovered that the man who deceives others, who strives to gain his ends by false pretences, whose habitual conduct is a huge LIE, cannot be otherwise than a miserable man, even though his duplicity may for a time escape detection.

And our heroine? We rejoice to be able to state that her health is completely established, and that she is very happy with her husband and her children. For the rest, there does not exist on the globe at the present moment a more gentle-hearted, devout, and guileless lady than Virginia, Countess of Garlford.

The earl has caused an inscription to be placed over the grave in Winterham cemetery in memory of his infant son.

And now an apology is due to Sebastian Botoner, whom we have described as the hero of this story, for having so longed delayed further mention of his name and doings. But little, indeed, remains to be told, since his career has been smooth and prosperous. The reader will remember that it was pretty generally known in Davenstone, at the time of our heroine's wedding, that the young inventor was engaged to be married to the mayor's

second daughter. Felicia had not gone up to London without a few parting words with her It had been arranged that very soon after her return the services of Mr. Shearwater were to be called into requisition to unite her and Sebastian in the bonds of holy matrimony. Their wedding, however, had been postponed by Virginia's re-appearance in Davenstone, her sudden flight, and the mystery that hung about her fate. Then commenced the eager search for her, the results of which we have been relating. Sebastian had assisted in that quest. At this period he had already become a noted as well as an opulent man. Parliament, sensible of the public utility of his invention, had passed the Bill, as we know, which granted all the powers he needed for successfully carrying out his scheme.

The shares in the Steam Tramway Company had been readily taken up; the line of traffic between Davenstone and Leeton was completed and opened with due solemnity—in short, he had become quite a celebrity. Lines similar to the one we have mentioned have been laid in several towns of considerable importance; and upon all these lines the loco-

motive and car which Botoner has patented are in use. Fresh lines are being rapidly opened at the present time throughout the Old and New World, so that our hero is deriving a large income from his invention, while a still more plenteous harvest remains The scheme to be reaped. Nor is this all. Sebastian devised for making watches by machinery has been brought to a state of perfection, and is on the point of being introduced. The machinery is comparatively plain and simple in its character, but it is declared by the manufacturers to answer the purpose as well, if not better, than the intricate and expensive combination of mechanical powers in vogue with the Americans. Thus the crv that went forth through Davenstone, 'Botoner will save the town!' has been proved literally true, since there is every prospect that the dear, quaint old place will now be able to compete successfully with the foreigner.

Soon after the health of the countess had been restored, and when she and the earl had betaken themselves to the continent, a grand wedding was celebrated in Thacker's Yard. Sebastian was then united in matrimony to Felicia Eagles. The officiating minister was Mr. Shearwater, who used his gold eyeglass in a most effective manner, and afterwards cracked a few jokes at the wedding breakfast. Among the presents displayed in 'the house by the churchyard' upon that occasion, the most costly, conspicuous, and highly-prized were the gift of Virginia, Countess of Garlford, and her noble husband.

Not long afterwards there was another notable wedding in Davenstone. This took place, not at Thacker's Yard, but at St. Peter's Church, which was crowded with spectators eager to witness the nuptials of Valentine Laxey and the innkeeper's pretty daughter Rose. There were nearly four thousand persons present, and the vast edifice, with its arcaded forest of arches, its colossal windows of exquisite stained glass, and its noble roof, presented a very grand appearance. The popular clergyman of the parish was assisted by the Rev. Ambrose Wilton, vicar of Slagthorpe, who had been specially invited for the occasion.

It was a merry party that met afterwards at the Lady Enid Hotel. The black-bearded host was in his most playful mood. Well he might be. He was perfectly satisfied with the choice Rose had made, he was content with his own lot, and he was prouder than ever of his graceful wife. Moreover, his business was flourishing in a satisfactory manner. Pepper's house had been pulled down, the innyard widened, and Melody was now looking cautiously about for some other safe and profitable investment for his superfluous capital.

None of the guests enjoyed himself more thoroughly than did Sebastian Botoner, who had by this time returned, with his sensible and light-hearted wife, from their honeymoon The inventor's appearance had improved since his marriage. He was not so thin, and he stooped less at the shoulders. His tall form towered above the rest of the company, and his striking features were eloquent with benignity, thoughtfulness, and power. His silky brown hair curled in close masses about his head, his brow was broad and clear, his blue eyes sometimes quick and piercing in their glance, at others dreamy and abstracted. Sebastian seemed marvellously taken with the society of Mr. Wilton.

two men got together in a corner of the room, when the bride and bridegroom had taken their departure, and conversed in a learned and edifying manner upon various subjects, chiefly philology, with a particular reference to the Oriental group of languages. By-and-by they began to talk about Church government. Upon this topic our hero found that Mr. Wilton was more than a match for him, by reason of his deeper acquaintance with early Church history. Nevertheless, Botoner manfully stuck to his colours—in fact he was quite eager in the fray, and dealt some heavy blows at his opponent.

'Prove to me,' said Sebastian, 'that a paid ministry is not an invention of man,—that there was any such thing in the time of the apostles! For my part, I think we have all departed from God's pure, simple institution, and the sooner we return to it the better. I cannot find in my Greek Testament any Christian community mentioned that was constituted like either the Establishment or any of our Dissenting societies. The churches of the first two centuries were governed by elders, who followed some secular calling for their daily bread. There were then no train.

ing colleges, there was no priesthood—all were equal—all ministered in their turn according to their gift. That was God's plan, but we have presumptuously departed from it. A pastorate which bargains for a regular salary and arrogates to itself exclusive privileges, is an evil which ought to be removed, and the primitive system restored.'

When Botoner had ended, the vicar calmly and forcibly replied. He showed that there were from the first three orders in the Christian Church, namely, bishops, priests, and deacons; and he maintained that the Church of England, although she stood in great need of reform, was yet on the whole a grand representative of the spirit of true religion. To some extent Sebastian admitted this latter proposition, and ultimately the argument was brought to a close, as arguments generally are, leaving both disputants unconvinced, and holding the same positions as when they began. Of course the reader will understand that we do not consider ourselves responsible for our hero's opinions, but that we have simply endeavoured to portray the man as he actually exists.

Mr. Rollick also was present at the Lady

Enid Hotel on this occasion, having left little Harold Wilton in good health, and come down from the north with the vicar of Slagthorpe, by invitation. The surgeon was one of the gayest of the party, entertaining them with recitations and comic songs, besides discoursing eloquently upon hieroglyphics, the Shemitic languages, shooting, bird-nesting, and rat-catching.

Mr. and Mrs. Eagles were guests likewise. The mayoress looked more rosy and buxom than ever, while the mayor (in his second year of office), a little less proud and stern than when we first knew him, acquainted Felicia (just returned from the wedding tour) that there was a new 'Mutual Elevation Society' at Thacker's Yard, the former one, whereof Messrs. Sheap, Slicer, Ivory, Cobb, and Twilight were members, having been dissolved by universal consent. The old society had been in a languishing state, it appeared, ever since the memorable evening when the full-dress rehearsal of the 'Moorish Corsair's Revenge' had ended so disastrously. Mr. Eagles told his daughter that he had always said they were nothing better than a crew of silly, conceited pretenders, and he was glad there was an end of their antics. The new association, he added, was of a different character, and he heartily wished it success.

The mayor told the company, in answer to a question put by Melody, that the threatened proceedings against the charity trustees had been abandoned; secondly, that the corporation hoped yet to be able to compel the butchers of the town to use the public shambles; and thirdly, that if he could prevent it there, should never be a grand procession in Davenstone again.

Whereupon Alderman Jeffard, another of the guests, slapped his thigh and burst into a boisterous laugh, declaring that there should be a better one than ever next year.

THE END.

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